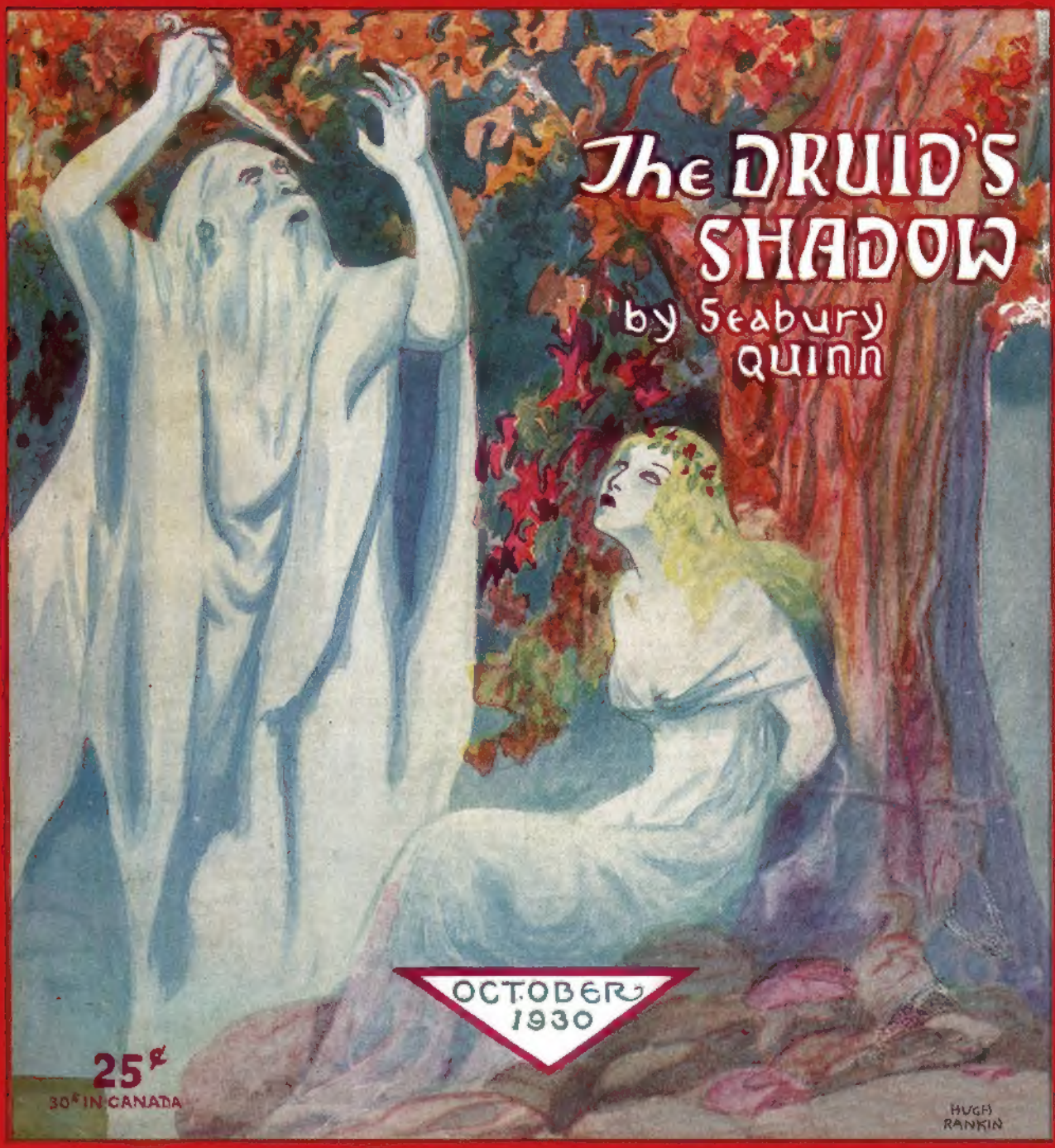
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



ANNOUNCING

A Brand New Magazine

EDITED BY

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT

Editor of WEIRD TALES

As a reader of our magazine, WEIRD TALES, we wish to make you acquainted with a new magazine which will be on sale at all newsstands September 15th.

For several years we have had a strong demand from our readers for an Oriental story magazine, in which the strange mysteries of the East play the important part.

We have given the matter a great deal of careful thought, and have decided to publish a high-class all-fiction magazine specializing in glamorous stories of the East. Its name will be:

We will have the co-operation of our good old authors, as well as many new ones. They are all very enthusiastic about this new magazine, principally because there are today very few good stories of this kind in print, and the possibilities are so great in this colorful field.

Asia, land of mystery, land of intrigues, and red war, and languorous loves, home of Harun al-Rashid the Just, Tamerlane the Magnificent and Genghis Khan the Red Scourge—Asia offers the most fascinating field for fiction in the whole world. The glamor of the Orient—Samarkand, Bagdad, the fabled cities of Cathay, Xanadu, home of Kubla Khan; Bokhara, Yokohama, Singapore—the very names breathe romance and glamor of mystery and hidden things. As Frank Owen says in SINGAPORE NIGHTS: "The East never sleeps, never rests. Its maze of confusion and mystery flows onward endlessly."

At last a fascinating magazine is to be devoted entirely to this land of mystery and romance, of adventure and red war. An amazing array of fine stories has already been marshaled for the first few issues of ORIENTAL STORIES. Among the marvelous tales which have been prepared for your delectation are:

SINGAPORE NIGHTS, by Frank Owen. A romantic, thrilling tale of Singapore, the meeting-place of the Orient, and a startling strange adventure therein.

THE COBRA DEN, by Paul Ernst. A weird mixture of snakes, Arab intrigue and the African desert, cooked into a delectable story-dish by a well-known writer.

EYES OF THE DEAD, by Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner. Mahbub, the Afghan hillman, went far and braved direful perils to avenge the death of his kinsman, Yar Khan.

THE MAN WHO LIMPED, by Otis Adelbert Kline. The strange and disagreeable adventure of Hamed the Attar and how he overcame his perverse hatred of women.

THE DESERT WOMAN, by Richard Kent. A modern Thais came out of the Great Desert and attempted to lure a priest, with strange consequences.

THE SLAVE OF JUSTICE, by E. Hoffmann Price. The story of a minor Asiatic potentate who had to pass judgment of death on his own son.

THE WHITE QUEEN, by Francis Hard. A strange tale of a chess game played in the heart of the Arabian desert, with human beings for pieces and life and death as stakes.

THE GREEN JADE GOD, by John Briggs. An unusual story about three enemies, one blind, one deaf and one tongueless, who were forced into a strange comradeship—a story of India and a native idol.

THE TIGER'S EYE, by Pearl Norton Swet. A strange curse followed the killing of the tiger with the blue eye—a weird story of Bengal and a disastrous tiger-hunt.

THE CIRCLE OF ILLUSION, by Lottie Lesh. A peculiar story was that told by the Collector of Antiques—a tale of the Unfinished Buddha and the love of a Japanese priest for the daughter of the emperor.

FINGER OF KALI, by Bernice T. Banning. A story of the Sacred Bull of Shiva the Destroyer and a dagger with strangely potent qualities.

GOLDEN ROSEBUD, by Dorota Flatau. A grim story of a blighted Chinese romance and the unutterable cruelty of China under the Mandarins.

THE VEILED LEOPARD, by G. G. Pendarves. A thrilling story of the slave trade and a half-breed Arab leader whom the Touareggs called the Leopard.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS, by S. B. H. Hurst. A striking tale of the clash of Russian and British interests in Islam—of a fierce Afghan of the Durani Clan, the slave region of Ruba el Khali and the adventurous secret service man, Buga Sinnat.

These and many other wonderful tales are in store for the readers of this newest and greatest of fiction magazines. Every story will be utterly strange and unusual; no humdrum tales will be offered to you, but instead a fascinating collection of stories that breathe the very spirit of the Orient. It will be well illustrated by competent artists and will be edited by Farnsworth Wright, present editor of WEIRD TALES. We hope you will give this new magazine a warm welcome.

First Issue on Sale September 15th. Be Sure to Get Your Copy

Classics of Weird Literature

Autographed by the Author

By FRANK OWEN

ACCLAIMED BY CRITICS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

New York Times: "Fanciful, touched by the supernatural, exotic in thought and coloring. Flowers, poems, music and jade are interwoven with their themes and the effect is often both quaint and charming."

The China Weekly Review, Shanghai, China: "Reveals a true sense of gentleness, the heart of a dreamer, a deep sense of rhythm and beauty. He sees China and the Chinese through misty, naive, sometimes philosophic eyes."

Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Honolulu, Hawaii: "They are strange and glowing tales of an unearthly beauty. Their scenes are laid in China but they might be anywhere. They are essentially a part of the history of those lost lands where Dunsany's heroes live and die magnificently and where Walter de la Mare's dark travelers knock vainly at mysterious moonlit doors."

Ohio State Journal, Columbus, Ohio: "There is some weirdness here, some mystery and some tender passages, enough of each to make a superlative ensemble that won for this author a secure place in the field of Far East fiction."

Daily Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, S. D.: "This is a collection to be read, laid down and read again."

Wilmington Every Evening, Wilmington, Del.: "Deserves a place among one's favorite books."

Radio Station KDKA, Pittsburgh: "For those who are interested in Chinese literature and traditions, we believe this book will find a cordial welcome. A very beautiful book."

The Globe, Toronto, Ont.: "Dealing with curious phases of Chinese life, they are imaginative, colorful and replete with poetry. For the first of these qualities they might be likened to some of the creations of Edgar Allan Poe, but even the weirdest of them possess a tenderness to which Poe was a stranger."

Arizona Republican, Phoenix, Ariz.: "It is not often that such a book, as deserving of praise and as full of real literary merit as "The Wind That Tramps the World," comes our way. This sounds like effusiveness, but it isn't. It's merely giving credit for a real literary achievement. . . . They are masterpieces of a rich imagination, deep and gripping in their beauty and romance."

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XVI NUMBER 4

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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THE EYRIE

THE new typographical appearance of WEIRD TALES is highly commended by our readers, who find it easier to read, easier to keep open, and more restful to the eyes. We have received a number of letters commending the change in type and size, but will quote only one, as that is representative of the others. Donald Wandrei, author of *The Red Brain,* writes to the editor: "The new format of WEIRD TALES is a splendid improvement. The pages are more attractive and far easier to read. Congratulations!"

"I like the current issue of WEIRD TALES so very much that I feel constrained to tell you of it," writes Dale V. Simpson, of Marion, Ohio, in a letter to the Eyrie. "*Earthworms of Karma* is such a *different* interplanetary tale that if the other two installments are on a par with the one I have read, I think it will indeed be long remembered. Many of your readers may not agree with me at all! But the idea of Earth-beings passing on to other planets after death—it certainly is a unique and *plausible* theory. Dexter is *good,* in my estimation. I have only one criticism—it is not serious. In one part of his story he mentions the grass and the foliage on the trees. In another he speaks of the temperature being below zero at night! The purple foliage *might* get badly 'nipped.' Oh, well. . . . A story I very much enjoyed reading—or rather re-reading—was *A Child's Dream of a Star,* by Charles Dickens. I remember reading this when a small boy. I am sure it was in one of my school readers—possibly McGuffey's—and the reading of it brought memories. *Sadastor* was fine, as was *The Ruling Passion.* In fact, I do not think there was a story in the issue that could be classed as low in the scale or even as mediocre. Yours for more and—if possible—better stories."

Mrs. Jean Rogers, of Rock Springs, Wyoming, writes to the Eyrie: "I am still raving over *The Rats in the Walls* in the June issue. Mr. Lovecraft is a marvelous writer. This and *The Dunwich Horror* are his finest works. One never knows how the stories will turn out in WEIRD TALES. They're different from other magazines. They are more than interesting. Please reprint some of Greye La Spina's stories. I have never forgotten those werewolf stories by this author. WEIRD TALES is improving all the time, if that is possible."

Writes Joseph Pasek of North Chicago, Illinois: "I have been reading some of the knocks directed against your covers. Well, I don't know what those people expect. I

(Continued on page 438)

NEXT MONTH

Don't miss this group of fine stories scheduled to appear in the November issue of WEIRD TALES on sale October 1.

Kings of the Night

by Robert E. Howard

Red battle raged when Kull, king of Valusia, came from out of the mists of his Shadow Kingdom to lead the Norsemen in a fierce fight against the Roman Legionaries.

Stealthy Death

by Seabury Quinn

Jules de Grandin pits himself against the murderous guile of East Indian Dakaits—a tale of grisly assassinations.

Tales of the Werewolf Clan

by H. Warner Munn

A new series of unusual stories narrating the adventures of the progeny of the Werewolf of Ponkert.

The Cosmic Cloud

by Edmond Hamilton

A vast cloud of utter blackness beat against the edges of our universe, threatening all its crowded suns and worlds with annihilation—a fascinating weird-scientific novelette.

The Debt

by Eric A. Leyland

For twenty years Marston dodged the wraith of the man he had sent to a shameful death—and then came the gruesome tragedy.

The Uncharted Isle

by Clark Ashton Smith

Utterly strange adventure in an utterly strange land—a most unusual tale by the author of "The End of the Story."

A Million Years After

by Katharine Metcalf Roof

The tale of a hideous prehistoric reptile, the sight of which blasted the reason of the two yeggs. A strange and startling story is this. We know you will be thrilled.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the November issue of WEIRD TALES

November Issue on Sale October 1

Subscription Rates: $2.50 a year in U. S. or possessions; Canadian $3.00; Foreign $3.50.
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am not ashamed to buy WEIRD TALES and show it to anybody. The cover *is* something different. Do not change it just to suit a few. Most of your readers think it's all right, and the majority rules."

"What has happened to Greye La Spina?" asks Roy Roland, of Detroit, in a letter to the Eyrie. "If it is at all possible, let us have a story by this interesting writer of ghost tales. I believe it is about three years since he has appeared within the pages of W. T. Robert E. Howard and ' 's Solomon Kane stories have me pleading for more stories about the adventures of this likable character. Please induce Mr. Howard to give us a sequel—and still more sequels—about this Kane person." [A new serial by Greye La Spina begins in this issue.—THE EDITORS.]

L. Erwin, of Saranac Lake, New York, writes to the Eyrie: "I always enjoy Jules de Grandin and I want to ask for a reprint or two. I would like to reread *The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee* by Arthur J. Burks, published in May, 1926, I think. Then, afterward, just when I can't say, was one named *The Monster-God of Mamurth,* by Edmond Hamilton. I do hope I can read these again and will save them if they do appear. I read many magazines, but WEIRD TALES is by far my favorite."

Mrs. William Haas, of Alexandria, Indiana, writes to the Eyrie: "I have just read in your June issue a story by Clark Ashton Smith. The man's imagination and technique are worthy of the highest commendation and I shall look forward to more stories by this remarkable writer. He has a different tone, a different style, and a different story."

Alice I'Anson writes from Mexico City: "I have been reading with considerable interest the last batch of letters in your July WEIRD TALES. Let me add to the other encomiums my own praise for Clark Ashton Smith's tale, *The End of the Story.* My favorite reading of the weird type is that dealing with haunted castles, mediæval ruins, and such-like things, with a thread of poetic fantasy running through them."

Perrin C. Hailey, of Little Rock, Arkansas, writes to the Eyrie: "As an enthusiastic reader of WEIRD TALES I want to state that it is the best magazine on the stands. The stories are very fascinating and different from the general run of stories and make the magazine stand out by itself. You have a good selection of writers and I very seldom find a story I do not care for. Lovecraft is my favorite writer—his story, *The Rats in the Walls,* is one of the best I have ever read. I wish one of his stories could be printed every month. Seabury Quinn and Robert E. Howard are usually very good, but the story that still sticks in my mind is *The Law of the Hills* by Grace M. Campbell. I am very much in favor of reprints, especially those from back issues of WEIRD TALES. I could suggest a story that appeared in a 1928 issue, *The Rays of the Moon.* May your magazine have continued success in the future as it has in the past."

Writes Arthur Argast, of West Hartford, Connecticut: "In my estimation WEIRD TALES stands head and shoulders above all the 'Western' and 'adventure' magazines put together. When I buy my copy of WEIRD TALES I know I shall be spared the drab monotony of the conventional hero from the East who courts the ranch-owner's daughter and traps the cattle-rustler. In the pages of WEIRD TALES I am spared the

(Continued on page 558)

"She is Yours, Master!"

SICK at heart the trembling girl shuddered at the words that delivered her to this terrible fate of the East. How could she escape from this Oriental monster into whose hands she had been given—this mysterious man of mighty power whose face none had yet seen?

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The Druid's

by SEABURY QUINN

"TEN thousand little small blue devils! It is annoying. I am vexed, I am harassed, I am exasperated!" Jules de Grandin felt successively in the pockets of his blue-flannel jacket, his oyster-white linen waistcoat and his pin-striped trousers, then turned such a wobegone face to me that I burst out laughing.

"Ha, *sale bête,* you laugh at my distress?" he demanded fiercely. "So. *Parbleu,* you shall pay dearly for your levity. I give you choice of three alternatives: Hand me a cigarette forthwith, convey me instantly where more can be purchased, or die by my hand within the moment. Choose!" He tweaked the tightly waxed ends of his diminutive wheat-blond mustache after the manner of the swashbuckling hero in a costume melodrama.

"I never smoked a cigarette in my life, so my first chance is gone," I grinned, "and I'm too busy to have you kill me this afternoon, so I suppose I'll have to cart you to a cigar store. There's the railway station, shall we get them at the news stand?"

I maneuvered the car across the busy street and parked beside the station entrance. "Wait a minute," I called as he leaped nimbly to the platform, "you've put bad ideas in my head. I think I'll get a cigar here. I don't usually smoke while driving, but——"

"Perfectly," he interrupted with an impish grin, "and you shall buy me a packet of cigarettes when you purchase

Shadow

"By the heart I would have plucked from your breast I would have made my divinations."

your cigar. I impose the penalty for laughing at my misfortune a moment since."

The customary exsurgence which heralded the arrival of a train from the West was beginning as I paused beside the cigar counter. Red Caps moved leisurely toward the landing-platform, a baggage agent opened his book and drew the pencil from his cap band, one or two hotel runners showed signs of returning animation as they rose from the bench where they lounged.

I pocketed my change and turned to light my cigar as the locomotive snorted to a halt and passengers began alighting from the Pullmans, but a cheery hail brought me about as I was in the act of rejoining de Grandin. "Hullo, there, Doctor Trowbridge — imagine running into you at the station—you're a sight for tired eyes! Now it *does* seem like getting home!" Burned to a crisp by the Arizona sun, lean, but by no means emaciated, and showing no trace of the decline which had driven him from our damp

Eastern climate three years before, young Ransome Bartrow shouldered his way through the crowd and took my hand in a bone-crushing grip. "By George, I'm glad to see you again, sir!" he assured me, grinding my knuckles till I was ready to roar with pain.

"And I'm glad to see you, Rance," I answered. "It's hardly necessary to ask how you feel, but——"

"No buts about it," he returned with a laugh. "The doctors looked me over with a microscope—if I'd had anything from dandruff to flat feet they'd have found it—and pronounced me cured. I can live here the rest of my life, and needn't get nervous prostration every time I'm caught in a rain storm, either. Ain't that great?"

"It surely is," I congratulated. "Got your baggage? Come on, then, I want you to meet——"

"Holy smoke, that reminds me!" he burst out. "*I* want *you* to meet——" He turned, dragging me after him to a modishly dressed young woman who mounted guard above an imposing pile of hand-luggage. "Sylvia, dear," he announced, "this is Doctor Trowbridge. He's had the honor of knowing your lord and master since he was one second old. Doctor Trowbridge, this is my wife."

As I took the girl's hand in mine I was forced to admit Ransome had made an excellent choice, if externals were to be trusted, for she was pretty in an appealing way, with large gray eyes, soft ash-blond hair and a rather sad mouth, and from the look she gave her husband there was no need to ask whether theirs had been a love match.

"And now to meet the stern parent," young Bartrow proclaimed. "I wrote Dad I was bringing him a surprize, but I didn't tell him what it was, and I didn't tell what train I was coming on. Wanted to take him unawares, you know. I—oh, I say, Doctor Trowbridge, won't you come up to the house with us? Maybe the pater will have a stroke or something when he meets Sylvia, and it's only Christian for us to have a physician along to administer first aid and take his dying statement. Even if he doesn't go into convulsions, it'll be worth your trip to see his face when I say, 'Meet the wife.' What d'ye say?"

My commonplace reply was foreign to my thoughts, for there was more than a possibility the boy's jesting prediction might be realized.

Ransome Bartrow was his father's idol. He was his parents' first and only child, born when both were well past forty, and his advent had led to complications which took his mother's life within a year. His father had married relatively late in life, and with the passing of his adored wife had lavished all the affection of his lonely life upon his son. There was money in abundance, and nothing which could be bought had ever been denied the boy. Copybook maxims to the contrary notwithstanding, young Ransome had developed into a fine young man. He stood well in all his classes at school and excelled in most forms of athletics, rowing stroke on his varsity crew. Entering business with his father after graduation, he showed an aptitude for work which seemed to guarantee success to the newly formed firm of James Bartrow & Son, but before a year had passed the malady which strikes so many former oarsmen fastened on him, and only a hurried trip to Arizona saved his life. From the day his son departed to the West the father had counted the minutes of their separation like a rosary of sorrow, and now when his boy returned only to present a strange young woman who by the law of God and man had first claim on his affections —there might be need for digitalis when the bride was introduced.

JULES DE GRANDIN greeted the youngsters with all the gay enthusiasm he always showed for lovers. Before we had traversed a dozen blocks toward the Bartrow mansion he was sitting with an arm about the shoulders of each, rattling off anecdote after droll anecdote, and Ransome Bartrow's deep, booming laughter mingled with the silvery laugh of his bride as they listened to the witty little Frenchman's sallies.

James Bartrow stood in the broad drawing-room of his big house, straining thoughtfully at the fireless hearth behind its fencing of polished brass fender. He was a big man, well over six feet tall, with a big head crowned with a mane of iron-gray hair and a trimly cut white beard. Something in the bigness and obvious power—physical and mental—of the man seemed to strike his son with awe, and as he tiptoed into the apartment, his bride's hand in his, de Grandin and I at his elbow, his buoyant self-assurance deserted him for the first time.

"Dad?" the appellation was pronounced with questioning diffidence. "Oh, Dad?"

Bartrow wheeled with a nervous jerk, his big, florid face in its frame of white hair lighting up at sound of his son's voice, and took a quick step forward.

"O-o-oh!" the exclamation was soft, scarcely audible, but freighted with sudden panic consternation, and the little bride cringed quickly against her husband's arm. The half-nervous, half-playful smile froze on her lips, leaving her little white teeth partially exposed, as though ready to bite. The merry light in her gray eyes blurred to a set, fixed stare of horror as a convulsive shudder of abhorrence ran through her. It was as though, expecting to meet a friend, she had been suddenly confronted by a gruesome specter—an apparition she had reason to dread and hate.

"Oh, Rance," she pleaded in a voice thick with terror. Oh, Rance—please——" Pounding heart and laboring lungs choked her voice, but the wild, imploring glance she gave her husband pleaded for protection with an eloquence no words could equal.

Startled by the girl's unreasoning fright, I glanced at Bartrow. He had paused almost in the act of stepping; his forward foot rested lightly on the floor, scarcely touching the polished boards, and in his face had come an expression I could not fathom. Astonishment, incredulous delight, something like exultation, shone in his steel-blue eyes, and the smile which came unbidden to his bearded lips was such as a fanatic inquisitor might have worn when some long-sought and particularly virulent heretic came into his power.

The tableau lasted but an instant, and for that fleeting second the sultry September air was charged with an electric thrill of concentrated terror and delight, panic fear and savage exultation of vengeance about to be fulfilled.

Then we were once more normal Twentieth Century people. With words of welcome and genial thumps upon the back and chest James Bartrow greeted his son, and he was the smiling, jovial, newfound father to the bride. But I noticed that the kiss he placed upon her dutifully upturned cheek was the merest perfunctory salutation, and as his lips came near her face the girl's very flesh seemed to cringe from the contact, light as it was.

Bartrow's heavy voice boomed out an order, and a cobweb-festooned bottle in a wicker cradle was brought from the cellar by the butler. The wine was ruby-red and ruby-clear, and Jules de Grandin's small blue eyes sparkled appreciatively as they beheld the black-glass bottle. "Arcachon '89!" he murmured almost piously as he passed the glass under his nostrils,

savoring the wine's aroma reverently before he drank. "*Mordieu*, it is exquisite!"

But while the rest of us drank deeply of the almost priceless vintage little Mrs. Bartrow scarcely moistened her lips, and at the bottom of her eyes when they turned toward her father-in-law was a look that made me shiver. And in her soft, low voice there came a thin, metallic rasp whenever she spoke to him which told of fear and abhorrence. By the way she sat, every nerve tense to the snapping-point, I could see she struggled mightily for self-control.

It made me ill at ease to watch this veiled, silent battle between James Bartrow and his son's wife, and at the first opportunity I murmured an excuse that I had several calls to make and hastened to the outside air.

I shot the starter to my car and turned toward home, wondering if I had not imagined it all, but:

"*Tiens,* my friend, the situation, it is interesting, *n'est-ce-pas?*" remarked de Grandin.

"The situation?" I countered. "How do you mean?"

"*Ah bah,* you do play the dummy merely for the pleasure of being stubborn! What should I mean? Does the welcomed-home bride customarily regard her hitherto unknown *beau-père* as a bird might greet a suddenly-met serpent? And does the father-in-law usually welcome home his son's wife with an expression which might have done great credit to the wicked, so hungry wolf when *la petite Chaperon Rouge* came tap-tapping at her grandmamma's cottage-door? I damn think not."

"You're crazy," I assured him testily. "It's unfortunate, I'll admit; but there's no ground for you to build one of your confounded mysteries on here."

"U'm? And what is your explanation?" he returned in a flat, accentless tone.

"Why, I can only think that Bartrow reminds his daughter-in-law irresistibly of someone she fears and hates through and through, and——"

"*Précisément,*" he agreed with a vigorous nod, "and that someone she must have hated with a hate to make our estimates of hatred pale and watery. More, she must have feared him as a mediæval anchoret feared erotic dreams. Perhaps, also, since you are in explanatory mood at present, you will explain the look of recognition—of diabolic, devilish surprized recognition—which came upon Monsieur Bartrow's face as he beheld the young *Madame* for the first time?

"*Hein?*" he prodded as I was silent.

"Oh, I don't know," I answered shortly. "It *was* queer, confoundedly queer, but——"

"But I have small doubt we shall learn more anon than we now know," he interrupted complacently. "Me, I think we have not seen the last act of this so interesting little play, my friend."

WE HAD not. The sun had hardly commenced to stain the eastern sky next morning when the nagging chatter of my bedside telephone roused me and Ransome Bartrow's frightened voice implored my services. "Sylvia—it's Sylvia!" he told me breathlessly. "She's in a dreadful state!" then crashed the 'phone receiver back into its hook before I had a chance to ask him what the trouble was.

Alert as a cat, however deeply he might seem immersed in sleep, de Grandin was at my side before I finished dressing, and when I told him Ransome wanted me he dashed back to his room, donned his clothes with more speed than a fireman responding to a third alarm and joined me at the curb as I made ready to dash across town to the Bartrow home.

The chill of early morning drove the last trace of sleep from our eyes as we

rushed through the quiet streets, and we were efficiently awake when Ransome Bartrow met us at the door.

"I don't know what it is—something's frightened her terribly—a burglar, perhaps—I can't get anything out of her!" he answered my preliminary questions as we trailed him up the stairs. "She's almost in collapse, Doctor. For God's sake, do something for her!"

Sylvia Bartrow was a pitiful figure as she lay in her bed. Her little, heart-shaped face seemed to have shrunk, and her big gray eyes appeared to have widened till they almost obscured her other features. Her cheeks were pale as the linen against which they lay, and her gaze was filmed with unspeakable horror. Without being told, I knew her whole being was vibrant with a desperate agony of terror, and I have never seen a glance more heartrending than the dumb, imploring look she cast on her husband as he entered.

"Shock," I pronounced after a hurried look, and turned to my medicine kit to fill a syringe with tincture digitalis. Plainly this case was too severe for aromatic ammonia or similar simple remedies.

"Shock?" young Bartrow repeated stupidly.

"*Mais oui,*" de Grandin explained patiently, "it is the relaxation of the controlling influence exercised by the nervous system on the vital organic functions of the body, my friend. Any extraordinary emotional stress may cause it, especially in women. What happened to affright *Madame* your wife? Surely, you were here?"

"No, I wasn't," Ransome confessed. "I couldn't sleep, and I'd gone downstairs. It's hot in Arizona, far hotter than here, but this damned damp heat is strange to me, and I couldn't bear lying in bed any longer. I'd about made up my mind to go out on the front porch and lie in a hammock when I heard Sylvia scream, and rushed up here to find her like this."

"U'm? And you heard nothing else?"

"No—er—yes; I did! As I dashed up the stairs, two at a time, I could have sworn I heard someone or something moving down the hall, but——"

"Some *thing, Monsieur*—can you not be more explicit?"

"Well, it sounded as though it might have been a man in stocking feet or rubber-soled shoes or—once while I was in the West a fool puma got into the upper story of the shack where I was sleeping and dashed around like a crazy thing till it found the open window and jumped out again. That's the way those footsteps—if they were footsteps—sounded. Like a great, soft-footed animal, sir."

"*Exactement,*" the Frenchman nodded gravely. "And *Monsieur* your father, you did call him?"

"I did, but Dad sleeps on the floor above, and his door was locked. I could hear him snoring in his room, and I couldn't seem to get any response to my knocking, so I telephoned Doctor Trowbridge.

"Will she recover—she's not dying, Doctor?" he asked in terror, coming to my side and looking at his wife with brimming eyes and quivering lips.

"Nonsense—of course, she's not dying!" I answered, looking up from the watch by which I timed the girl's pulse. "She's been badly frightened by something, but her heart action is getting stronger all the time. We'll give her a sedative in a little while, and she'll be practically as well as ever when she wakes up. I'd advise her to stay in bed and eat sparingly for the next day or two, though, and I'll leave some bromides to be taken every hour for the rest of today."

"Hadn't we better notify the police?

It might have been a burglar she saw," Ransome suggested.

Jules de Grandin walked to the window and thrust his head out. "It is twenty feet sheer to the ground with nothing a cat might climb," he remarked after a brief survey. "Your burglar did not enter here." Then: "You were on the lower floor when *Madame* alarmed you with her cry. Tell me, which way did the footsteps you heard seem to go?"

Ransome thought a moment, then: "It's hard to say exactly, but they *seemed* to go up, though——"

"A servant, perhaps?"

"No, I don't think so. The servants all sleep in the left wing on this floor, and I'm pretty sure none of 'em would have been up at that hour. But it might have been the burglar running toward the roof. Shall we look?"

We searched the third story of the house, with the exception of the chamber where James Bartrow lay in decidedly audible slumber, but nowhere did we find a trace of the intruder. At the stairway leading to the trap-door in the roof we paused, then turned away in disappointment. The door had long been secured by half a dozen twenty-penny nails driven through frame and casing. Nothing less than a battering-ram could have loosened it.

"Well, it's past me," Ransome confessed.

"You, perhaps, but not Jules de Grandin," the Frenchman answered. "I am interested, I am intrigued; my curiosity is aroused. I shall seek an explanation."

"Where?"

"Where but from Madame Sylvia? It was she who saw the intruder; who else can tell us more of him?"

"But, she's too ill——"

"Assuredly; I would not harass her with questions at this time; but when she is recovered we shall learn from her what it was that came. Me, I have already an idea, but I should like her to confirm it. Then we can take such measures as may be needed to guard against a recurrence. Yes. Certainly."

OFFICE hours were over and I was preparing to go upstairs and dress for dinner when James Bartrow stalked into my consulting-room. "See here, Trowbridge," he announced in his customary brusk manner. "I feel like hell on Sunday; I want you to help me snap out of it."

"All right," I acquiesced, "I think that can be arranged. What seems to be the trouble?"

He bit the end from a cigar of man-killing proportions, set it alight with the flame from his hammered gold lighter and blew a cloud of smoke toward me across the desk. "Ever feel like kicking a cripple's crutch out from under him?" he demanded. "Ever say to yourself when you were alone in the room with someone—especially if his back were turned to you—'It would take only one blow to knock him dead. Go on, hit him?" He exhaled another smoke-wreath and regarded me through the drifting white wreaths with an intent look which was almost a challenging glare.

Despite the man's seriousness, I could not repress a grin. "Certainly, I have," I answered. "Everybody has those inexplicable impulses to do mischief. Men are only little boys grown up, you know; the principal difference is the normal adult recognizes the childishness of these impulses and dismisses them from his mind. The child gives way to them, so does the subnormal adult whose mind has retained its infantile stature after his body had developed.

"You've been working pretty hard at the office lately, haven't you?" I added,

more as a peg on which to hang whatever treatment I recommended than as an actual question.

"No, I haven't," he assured me shortly. "I've been taking things devilish easy, and if you start any of that fool stuff about my needing to go away for a rest I'll clout you on the head; but——"

He paused, drew a deep inhalation from his cigar and expelled the smoke almost explosively, then:

"I might as well get it out," he exclaimed. "It's my daughter-in-law, Sylvia. Never saw anything like it. The moment I met the girl yesterday afternoon something seemed to snap like a steel trap inside my head. 'There she is,' a voice inside me seemed to say, 'you've got her at last; there she is, ready to your hand! Kill her, kill her; do it now!' Hanged if I didn't almost leap on the poor kid and strangle her where she stood, too. I know I frightened her, for I must have shown the insane impulse in my face as soon as my eyes lit on her. It was the scared look in her eyes that brought me to my senses. The impulse passed as quickly as it came, but for a moment I thought I was going to flop down in a faint; it left me weak as a cat."

"H'm," I murmured professionally. "You say this seizure came on you the moment you saw——"

"Yes, but that's not all," he interrupted. "I shouldn't be here if it were. I managed to shake off the desire to injure her—perhaps I'd better say it left of its own accord in a second—but last night I'd no sooner fallen asleep than I began dreaming of her. Lord!" He passed a handkerchief over his face, and I saw his hands were trembling. "I dreamed I was walking through a great, dark wood or grove of some sort. The biggest oak trees I've ever seen were everywhere about, their branches seemed to interlace overhead and shut out every vestige of light. Suddenly I came to the biggest tree of all, and as I halted a shaft of moonlight pierced through an opening in its foliage, letting a pencil of luminance down like a spotlight in a darkened theater. Before me, in the center of that beam of light, lay Sylvia, dressed in some sort of long, loose, flowing robe of thin white cloth, with a wreath of wild roses twined in her unbound hair. She was drawn back against the gnarled roots of the tree in a half-reclining position, her wrists and ankles fastened to them with slender wicker withes. As I stopped beside her she looked up in my face with such an expression of mingled pleading and fear that it ought to have melted my heart; but it didn't. Not by a damn sight. Instead, it seemed to incense me—set me wild with a maniacal desire to kill—and I reached down, tore her dress away from her bosom and was about to plunge a knife into her breast when she screamed, and the dream winked out like an extinguished candle-flame. Queer, too; I kept right on dreaming, realizing that I'd been dreaming of killing Sylvia and regretting that I hadn't been able to finish the crime. In my second dream I seemed to be deliberately wooing the return of the murder-dream, so I could take it up where I left off, like beginning a new installment of a story which had been continued at an exciting incident. Man, I tell you I never wanted anything in my life the way I wanted to kill that girl, and I've a feeling I shouldn't have stopped at mere murder if I'd been able to finish that dream!"

"Pardonnez-moi, Messieurs," de Grandin entered the consulting-room like an actor responding to a cue. "I was passing, I recognized Monsieur Bartrow's voice; I could not help but hear what he said.

"Monsieur," he directed a level, unwinking stare at the visitor, "what you dreamed last night was not altogether a

dream. No, there was action, as well as vision there. This afternoon, because the good Trowbridge was overburdened with work, I took it on myself to call on Madame Sylvia. It is not the physician's province to interrogate the servants, but this is more than a mere medical case. I felt it before, now I am assured of it. Therefore, I made discreet inquiries among your domestic staff, and from the laundress I did learn that a *chemise de nuit* of Madame Sylvia had been torn longitudinally—above the breast, even as you tore her robe in your dream, *Monsieur.*"

"Well?" Bartrow demanded.

"*Non,* by no means, it is not well, my friend; it is very far otherwise. You are perhaps aware that Madame Sylvia's indisposition arises from a fright she sustained from some unknown cause—a burglar, the hypothesis has been thus far?"

"Well?" Bartrow repeated, his face hardening.

"*Monsieur,* that burglar could not be found, neither hide nor hair of him could be discovered, though Doctor Trowbridge, your son and I did search your house with a comb of the fine teeth. No. For why?" He paused, regarding Bartrow and me alternately with his alert, cat-like stare.

"All right, 'for why?' " Bartrow demanded sharply when the silence had stretched to an uncomfortable length.

"Because, *Monsieur*"—de Grandin paused impressively—"because *you were that burglar!*"

"You're mad!"

"Not at all, I was never more sane; it is you who stand upon the springboard above the pool of madness, *Monsieur.* For why you had this impulse to slay a wholly inoffensive young lady whom you had never seen before, neither you nor we can say at this time with any manner of assurance; but that you had it and that it was almost overwhelming in its strength, even at its first onset, you admit. Consider: You understand the *psychologie?*"

"I know something of the principles."

"*Bien.* You know, then, that our conscious mind—the mind of external things—acts as the governor of our actions as the little whirling balls control the engine's speed. Do you also realize that it acts as a sort of mental policeman? Good, again.

"Now, when we wish to do a little naughty thing—or a great one, for that matter—and the sound common sense of this daytime conscious mind of ours overcomes the impulse, we say we have put it from our mind. Ah ha! It is there that we most greatly delude ourselves. Certainly. We have not put it from us; far otherwise; we have *repressed* it. As the businessman would say, we have 'filed it for future reference.' Yes. Often, by good fortune, the file is lost. Occasionally, it is found, only to be repressed once more by the conscious mind.

"But when normal conscious control is overthrown, one or all of these stored-away naughty desires come bubbling to the surface. Every surgeon has seen this demonstrated when nicely brought up young ladies or religious old gentlemen are recovering from anesthesia. *Cordieu,* the language they employ would put a coal-heaver to the blush!

"Attend me, if you please: The restraint of consciousness is entirely absent when we sleep—the policeman has put away his club and uniform and gone on a vacation. Then it is we dream all manner of strange, queer things. Then it is that a repressed desire, if it be strong enough, becomes translated into action while the dreamer is in a state of somnambulism. Then it was, *Monsieur,* you walked from out your room and would have done in earnest what you perpetrated in your

dream had not Madame Sylvia's scream summoned back some portion of the inhibitions of your waking self, so that you forbore to murder her, although the lingering remnant of your dream-desire stayed with you, and made you wish to do so."

The skeptical look on Bartrow's face gave way to an expression of grudging belief as the little Frenchman expanded his theory. "Well, what's to be done?" he demanded as de Grandin finished.

"I would suggest that you pack your golf clubs and go to Lake Hopatcong or the Kobbskill Club for a brief stay. There are certain matters we would attend to, and in the meantime you may recover from this so strange impulse to do your daughter-in-law an injury; I greatly fear you may do that for which you will be everlastingly sorrowful, should you remain.

"Do not mistake me," he added as Bartrow was about to form a rebellious reply, "it is no matter of exiling you from your own house, nor yet of cutting you from all communication from your son and his wife always. Quite no. We would have you absent for only a little while—no longer than is absolutely necessary—while we make arrangements. Be assured we shall write you to return at the earliest possible moment."

So it was arranged. Pleading frayed-out nerves and doctor's orders, James Bartrow left for Hopatcong that evening, leaving Ransome and his wife in possession of the house.

"Well, everything's satisfactorily arranged for a while, at least," I remarked as we returned from the station after seeing Bartrow off. "A few days of golf and laziness will probably sweep those cobwebs from his mind, and he'll be right as rain when he returns."

The little Frenchman shook his head. "We have disposed of only half the problem, and that but temporarily," he returned gloomily. "Why Monsieur Bartrow looked so strangely at his new daughter we know, though we do not know what caused the homicidal impulse which was behind the look; but why *she* regarded *him* with terror—ah, that is a far different matter, my friend, and one which needs explaining."

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "Why shouldn't she be afraid? What girl wouldn't be terrified if she saw a man look at her like that?"

"You do forget their recognition—and revulsion — was mutual and simultaneous," he reminded.

We finished our drive in silence.

SYLVIA BARTROW lay in a long wicker deck-chair in the cool angle of the piazza, an orchid negligée trimmed with marabou about her slender shoulders, an eiderdown rug gathered about her feet and knees. Though her improvement had been steady since her fright a week before, she was still pale with a pallor not to be disguised by the most skilfully applied cosmetics, and the dark violet circles still showed beneath her big, melancholy gray eyes. She greeted de Grandin and me with the faintest ghost of a smile as we mounted the porch steps.

"*Madame,* that we must trouble you thus drives us to the border of despair," the Frenchman declared as he took her pallid fingers and raised them to his lips, "but there are several questions we must ask. Believe me, it is of importance, or we should not be thus disturbing you."

The girl smiled at him with something like affection, for his uniform politeness endeared him to every woman from nine to ninety, and nodded amiably. "I'll tell you anything I can, Doctor de Grandin," she replied.

"Good. You are kind as you are beautiful, which is to say your generosity exceeds that of the good St. Nicholas," he

assured her as he drew up a chair, then:

"Tell us, *Madame,* just what it was that frightened you so terribly last week. Speak with confidence; whatever you may say is spoken under the seal of medical inviolability."

She knit her brows, and her big eyes turned upward, like those of a little girl striving desperately to recall her seven-times table. "I—don't—know," she answered slowly. "I know it sounds silly—impossible, even—but I can't remember a single thing that happened that night after I fell asleep. You'd think anything which frightened any one as much as I was frightened would be impressed on him in all its detail till his dying day; but the truth is I only remember I was terribly, horribly afraid of something which came to my room, and that's all. I can't even tell you whether it was human or animal. Maybe it was just an awful dream, and I'm just a silly child afraid of something which never was."

"U'm, perhaps," de Grandin agreed with a nod. Then: "Tell me, if you please, Madame Sylvia, were you frightened before this so unfortunate occurrence? Did anything distress you at any time, or seem to——"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "When I first entered the drawing-room, I went nearly wild with fright. When I looked at Daddy Jim standing there by the fireplace everything seemed to go red-hot inside me from my toes to my throat; I wanted to scream, but couldn't; I wanted to run away, but didn't have the strength. And when he turned and looked at me—I thought I should die. Just imagine, and Daddy Jim's such a nice old darling, too!"

"This feeling of terror, it passed away?" de Grandin pursued seriously.

"Yes—no; not immediately. After I'd met him I realized it *couldn't* have been Daddy Jim who frightened me, really, but there was a feeling of malaise which clung to me till——"

"Yes—till?" the Frenchman prompted as she hesitated.

"Till the big fright came and drove the little one away."

"Ah, so. You had never, by any chance, known any one whom you feared and hatred who resembled your so estimable father-in-law?"

"Why, no. I don't think I was really afraid of any one in my life—every one has always been kind to me, you know, and as for hating anybody, I don't think I could, really. I was just a little girl during the World War, and I used to try so hard to hate the Kaiser and von Hindenburg, but I never seemed able to do it as the other children could."

"I congratulate you," he commented noncommittally. "This so strange feeling of uneasiness, you still have it?"

"No-o, I don't. I did until——" She stopped, and her pale face suffused with a faint blush.

"Yes, *ma petite,* until?" he prompted softly, leaning forward and taking her fingers lightly in his hand. "I think I know what you would say, but I do desire confirmation from your own lips."

"It's no use," she answered as tears welled in her eyes. "I've tried to down it, to say it wasn't so for Rance's sake, but it is—it is! It's Daddy Jim—I'm afraid of him — terrified. There's no earthly reason for it; he's a dear, good, kind old man, and he loves Rance to distraction and loves me for Rance's sake, but I live in constant horror of him. When he looks at me I go cold and tremble all over, and if he so much as brushes against my skirts as he passes I have to bite my lips to keep from screaming. When he kissed me that day I thought my heart would stop.

"I can't explain it, Doctor de Grandin,

but the feeling's there, and I can't overcome it. Listen:

"When I was a little girl we lived on the outskirts of Flagstaff, and I had a little Maltese kitten for pet. One day I saw Muff with her back up and every hair on her tail standing straight out and her eyes fairly blazing with rage and fright as she backed slowly away from something on the ground and spit and growled with every breath. When I ran up I saw she was looking at a young rattlesnake which had come out to sun itself. That kitten had never seen a rattler or any kind of snake in all her little life, but she recognized it as something to be feared and hated—yes, *hated*—the moment she laid eyes on it. Her instinct told her. That's the way it is with me and my husband's father. Oh, Doctor de Grandin, it makes me so unhappy! I want to love him and have him love me, and I don't want to come between Rance and him, for they're all the world to each other, but——" The tears which jeweled her eyelids gushed freely now, and her narrow shoulders shook with sobs. "I try to love him," she wailed, "but I'm dreadfully afraid of him—I loathe him!"

"I knew as much already, *ma pauvre,*" the Frenchman comforted, "but be of cheer, already I think I have found a way to remove this barrier which stands between you and your father-in-law. Your fear of him is grown from something deep within you, a something which none of us can as yet understand, yet which must have its roots in reason. That reason we shall endeavor to find. If you will come to Doctor Trowbridge's tonight, we shall probe the underlying causes for this feeling of revulsion which so greatly troubles you."

"You—you won't hurt me?" she faltered. Plainly terror and sustained mental tension had broken her nerve, and her only thought was to avoid pain at any cost.

"Name of a little blue man, I shall say otherwise!" he exclaimed. "You and *Monsieur* your husband shall come to dinner, and afterward we shall talk—that is all. You are not terrified of that?"

"Of course not," she replied. "That will be delightful."

"*Très bon,* until tonight, then," once more he raised her hand to his lips, then turned and left her with a smile.

"WHAT do you make of it?" I asked as we drove homeward. "Doesn't it strike you she's trying to evade a direct answer when she says she can't remember what frightened her?"

"Not necessarily," he returned thoughtfully. "She deceives herself, but she does so honestly, I think. Consider: She is of a decidedly neurotic type, you are agreed on that?"

I nodded.

"Very good. Like most of her kind, she is naturally very sensitive, and would suffer keenly were it not for the protective mental armor she has developed. The other night she had an experience which would have driven more matter-of-fact persons into neurasthenia, but not her. No. She said mentally to herself, 'This thing which I have seen is dreadful, it is too terrible to be true. If I remember it I go mad. *Alors,* I shall not remember it. It is not so.' And thereupon, as far as her conscious memory is concerned, it is not so. She does not realize she has given herself this mental command, nor does she know she has obeyed, but the fact remains she has. The extreme mental torture she suffered when the apparition appeared before her is buried deeply in her subconscious memory — mentally cicatrized, we might say, for she has protected her sanity by the sudden development of a sort of selective amnesia. It is

better so; she might easily go mad otherwise. But tonight we shall open wide the secret storehouse of her memory, we shall see the thing which affrighted her in all its grisly reality, and we shall take it from her recollection forever. Yes. Never shall it trouble her again."

"Hump, you talk as though you were going to exorcise a demon," I commented.

He raised his shoulders and eyebrows in an eloquent shrug. "Who shall say otherwise?" he asked. "Long years ago, when the scientific patter we mouth so learnedly today had not been thought of, men called such things which troubled them by short and ugly names. She-devils which seduced the souls and bodies of men they called succubi; male demons which worked their will on women they denominated incubi. Today we talk of repressed desires, of unconscious libido, and such-like things—but have we gotten further than to change our terminology? One wonders. A tree you may denominate an oyster, and you may call an oyster a tree with equal ease, but all your new denominations to the contrary notwithstanding, the tree is still a tree, and the oyster nothing but an oyster. *N'est-ce-pas?*"

ADDED to his numerous other accomplishments, Jules de Grandin possessed unquestioned talents as a chef. He was the only man Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, would permit in her kitchen for longer than five minutes at a time, for across the kitchen range they met and gossipped as fellow artists, and many were the toothsome recipes they traded. That afternoon he was long in conference with my gifted though temperamental cook, and the result was a dinner the like of which has seldom been served in Harrisonville. Shrimp gumbo preceded lobster Cardinal and caneton à la presse followed lobster, while a salad garnished with a sauce which surely came from fairyland accompanied the duckling. From heaven alone knew where, de Grandin procured a bottle of Mirandol '93, and this, with one of Nora's famous deep-dish apple tarts and fromage Suisse completed the perfect meal.

Coffee and cognac were served on the side veranda, and while we enjoyed the delightful sensation of the mingled processes of digestion and slow poisoning by nicotine de Grandin took possession of the conversation.

"Your estimable father," he began, addressing Ransome, "he is a connoisseur of interior decoration; his drawing-room, it is delightful. That walnut wainscot, by example, it is——"

"Good Lord, you'd better not let Dad hear you call it walnut!" Ransome broke in with a laugh. "He'd have your life. That's oak, man; he imported it especially from England, bought it standing in an old house in Kent, and it cost him almost its weight in gold to bring it over. Oak's always been the passion of Dad's life, it seems to me. He's got a hundred or more pieces of antique oak—which is twice as rare as walnut, maple or mahogany—in the house, there are nothing but oak trees growing in the grounds, and every walking-stick he owns is carved from solid oak. He has to have 'em 'specially made, for they can't be had in the shops. I've seen him pick up an accorn in the woods and fondle it as a miser might a diamond."

"Eh, do you tell me so?" de Grandin's fingers beat a quick devil's tattoo on the arm of his chair. "This is of the interest. Yes. Is it that he also collects other *objets d'art?*"

"No-o, I couldn't say that, though he has a small collection of curios in the place. There's that old stone, for instance. He brought it from a place called Pwhyll-gor in Wales years ago, and has it

framed in native oak and hung up on the wall of his room. I never could see much sense in it; it looks pretty much like any other bit of flat, smooth rock to me, but Dad says it once formed part of a big ring of Cromlech and——"

"*Mort d'un rat âgé*, the light; I begin to commence to see!" exclaimed the Frenchman.

"What?"

"*Mille pardons*, my friend, I did but think aloud, and all too often I think that way at random. You were saying——"

"Oh, that's all there is to his collection, really. He's got a few curious old arrowheads, and a stone knife-blade or two, but I don't suppose a real collector would give him twenty dollars for the lot."

"*Certainement;* not if he were wise," de Grandin agreed.

Deftly he turned the talk to matters of psychology, detailing several interesting cases of split personality he had witnessed in the laboratories of the Sorbonne. "I have here, by happy chance, an interesting little toy which has of late received much use in the clinics," he added, apparently as an afterthought. "Would not you care to see it?"

Prompted by a sharp kick on the shins, I declared that nothing would please me more, and Ransome and Sylvia assented, mainly for politeness' sake.

"Behold it, is it not most innocent-looking?" he asked, proudly displaying an odd-looking contraption by means of which two circular looking-glasses, slightly smaller than shaving-mirrors, were made to rotate in opposing directions by means of a miniature motor.

"*Is* it dangerous?" asked Sylvia, her woman's curiosity slightly piqued.

"Not especially," he returned, "but it gives one queer sensations if one watches it in motion. Will you try?"

Without awaiting their reply he set the machine on the study table, switched off all the lights save the central bulb which shed its beams directly on the mirrors, and pressed the switch.

A light sustained humming sounded through the room, and the mirrors began describing their opposing orbits round each other at ever-increasing speed. I watched their dazzling whirl for a moment, but turned my eyes away as de Grandin tweaked me gently by the sleeve. "Not for you, Friend Trowbridge," he whispered almost soundlessly; then:

"Behold them, my friends, how they spin and whirl, is it not a pretty sight? Look carefully, you can distinguish the different speeds at which they turn. Closer, hold your gaze intently on them for a moment. Thus you may find—sleep—sleep, my friends. You are tired, you are *fatigués*, you are exhausted. Sleep is good—very good. Sleep—sleep—sleep!"

His voice took on a low, singsong drone as he repeated the admonition to repose again and yet again. Finally: "That is well. Be seated, if you please."

Like twin automata Ransome Bartrow and his bride sank into the chairs he hastily pushed forward. For a moment he regarded them thoughtfully, then snapped off the current from the motor and once more lit the lamps. Like a showman arranging his puppets, or a window-dresser disposing his figurines, he touched them lightly here and there, placing hands and feet in more restful positions, slipping cushions behind each reclining head. Then:

"Madame Sylvia, you hear me?" he asked softly.

"Yes," the reply was hardly audible as the girl breathed it lightly.

"Very good. Attend me carefully: It is the night of your arrival here. You

have gone to bed. You are asleep. What transpires?"

No answer.

"*Très bon;* all is yet quiet. It is two hours later. Do you see, do you hear anything?"

Still silence.

"*Bien.* It is the moment at which the intruder entered your chamber. What is it? *Who* is it? *Whom do you see?*" His final question came with sharp, sudden emphasis.

FOR a moment the girl reclined quietly in her easy-chair; then a light, moaning sound escaped her. She rolled her head restlessly from side to side, like a sleeper suffering a disagreeable dream, and her breathing came more quickly.

"Speak! I demand to know what you see—whom you see!" he ordered harshly.

A quick, convulsive shudder ran through her, and with a sudden, writhing movement she slipped from her chair and lay supine on the floor. Her eyelids were slightly parted, but the eyeballs were so far rolled back that only a tiny glistening crescent of white showed between her lashes. Again she moaned softly; then the whole expression of her features changed. She thrust her head a little forward, her pale cheeks flushed red, her mouth half opened and a desirous smile lay upon her lips. She raised her hands, making little downward passes before her face, as though she stroked the cheeks of one who bent above her, and a gentle tremor ran through her as her slim bosom expanded slightly and her mouth opened and closed in a pantomime of kissing. A deep sigh of ardent ecstasy issued from between her white teeth.

"*Grand Dieu,* what have we here?" de Grandin muttered nervously. "*C'est un incube!* Behold, Friend Trowbridge, from feet to head she is a vessel that fills itself with the sweet pains of love! What does it mean?"

But even as he spoke the tableau changed. With a sudden wrench she moved to free herself from the bonds of an amorous embrace, and on her countenance, but lately beatified with passionate love, there came a look of stark and abject terror. One arm was thrown across her face, as if to ward away a blow, and her breast rose and fell in labored respiration. Her cheeks again were pale, as if every vestige of blood had left them, even her lips were grayish-blue.

She struggled to her knees, and crept writhingly away till the wall cut off her retreat, and then she groveled on the floor, her forehead lowered, hands clasped protectively upon the upturned nape of her neck, and all the while she shook and trembled like a palsied thing.

From her blenched lips came a spate of words, but strange, foreign words they were, seemingly all consonants, and in a language I could not identify.

Then, at de Grandin's sharp command she turned to English, crying: "Mercy, my Lord! Is it sin that a woman young and fair should love? Look on this form, this body and these limbs——" She rose and faced an invisible accuser, her head thrown back, her hands outspread, as one who would display her charms to best advantage. "Was not I formed for loving and for love?" she asked. "How can I ever be the cold and stony-hearted servant of your order? 'Tis love that I was made for and love which I did crave. Can a woman's soul be forfeit if she does listen to the prompting of her woman's heart?

"O-o-h!" her shrill scream rent the quiet of the room. "Not that; not that, my Lord—anything but that! See"—she sank upon her knees and looked up plead-

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The Bride Well

by David H Keller

"They married, and the poor Overlord found that she was half woman and half snake."

IT WAS not till we came well within the boundaries of my beloved Cornwall that I realized the fact that my appearing before my subjects with a Welsh lady might not be either understood or acceptable to those sturdy knights who had been so faithful to me during the early days of my reign. It was all well enough to rescue the lovely Ruth and even spend long minutes driving the Devil back into her body with long, lingering kisses, but to boldly bring the same lady back to my domains might cause political disturbances of the direst nature. At the same time there was Ruth, on the horse, in front of me; and from certain clinging habits she had spontaneously developed, I had every reason to believe that she intended to remain within the curve of my left arm, waist-bound, for the rest of her life.

"I am Overlord of Cornwall," I at last made bold to say, "and much of my support comes from nobles with marriageable daughters. So long as I am a bachelor, these nobles will remain my friends, but if they saw you, and found out you were from Wales, then at once there would arise jealous dissensions. So, we stop at the first chapman's and buy masculine apparel for you, and you will go to my castle as a page."

"Shall I be your page?" Ruth asked.

"Oh! I presume so. At least I will have no other, and you can run my errands for me, and bind on my armor when I go giant-hunting."

"That will be nice. I think that I will look well in boy's clothes. I used to wear them when I was much younger. Will you give me a boy's name?"

We talked it all over and decided to call her Percy. Later on in the day we met a Jew who was selling clothing to

those who would buy, and with him I made a shrewd trade; so, when Ruth came out from behind the bushes she looked like a young lad, not yet shaven. The Jew took her clothes, and some silver, and left us.

Now after that I made Ruth ride behind me, and if there was any holding on to do, she could do it. All that day and one more day we rode, and that night we arrived once more at my castle. Giving orders that my faithful charger be well fed and bedded, and that the treasures I brought with me be safely secured behind lock and bar, I trudged rather wearily to my rooms to remove the iron and leather harness that seemed to be so necessary for a ruler to wear when out on the lonely roads of my country. I bethought me of King Arthur who made the land so safe that a gold bracelet hung on a thorn-bush for three years without being disturbed while it waited for its rightful owner. That was the kind of country I wanted Cornwall to be, some day.

Percy came after me into the privacy of my rooms, and ere I was aware she started to take off my armor, and cleverly found sweet oil to rub me with and my silks and soft leathers; so, before I realized it, I was in comfort before the fire, and she holding out to me a horn of spiced ale, which it seems she had ordered for my comfort on her way up the stone stairs.

After that, came some pleasant days in the library. Of course, Ruth could not read, but she had a clever understanding of the pictures, and her willingness to acknowledge that I knew more than she did was decidedly refreshing to my masculine pride. In my astonishing adventures in the Apurimac Valley, the Blessed Islands, Cabel and Dahomey, I had met many women, but never one who willingly acknowledged my intellectual supremacy. So, as the simple child seemed anxious to learn, I permitted her to look through many of my books and even spent long hours in reading to her. Of course, she wore her boy's clothes and I was very careful to call her Percy, but occasionally when we were alone I graciously gave her osculatory treatment for the Devil I had forced to enter her.

It was all very lovely and might have continued for an infinity of pleasant evenings, at least for a month or so, had it not been for an unexpected and slightly embarrassing visit from several of my mightiest nobles. There were but three of them, but so powerful were they in the affairs of Cornwall that they might as well have been thirty or three hundred. I received them in the library, first telling Percy to begone and stay begone till she knew they were safely out of the Castle. To help the page pass the time while away from me I gave into his hands a boy, wherefrom he could learn the letters, and thus come, some day, to be able to read.

BEFORE the fire the good knights Bevidere, Arthur and Mallory sat warming their shins and drinking my wine, the while looking at each other and then sidewise at me as though uncertain as to who should begin the conversation or as to the effect it would have on their Overlord. At last Mallory coughed and started to tell me what was on their minds.

"You must be willing to acknowledge, Cecil, son of James, son of David, son of John and even back to the son of Saint Christopher, that your arrival to our country and you becoming Overlord has been a matter of deep mystery to all of us."

"There is no doubt that it was most unusual," I replied.

"We admit that we needed a strong man to rule us. There were robbers and giants and demons within the realm and

many strong and jealous countries around us, anxious for our downfall. You arrived here at an opportune time, and, thanks to your ability as a giant-killer and politician, you have given Cornwall a sense of security that before your advent it strangely lacked."

"My record speaks for itself," I almost boasted. "Five robber gangs dispersed and from these over a hundred killed in battle or hung on dead limbs to warn all folk of the danger of acting thus in my confines. Three giants, seven deadly serpents, one dragon, and a number of salamanders and ogres have been sent to Limbo. Ireland, thanks to my magical powers, is more than friendly to us. Wales can not attack. In fact, only within the last few weks I adventured there and rid their land of a most horrific curse, following which adventure the King of Wales himself gave me many jewels and other presents of great value. Thus there is no doubt, at least in my mind, that Cornwall hath profited mightily by having me to take charge of the affairs of state."

Bevidere swore a mighty oath!

"By the bones of the eleven thousand and one virgins of Cologne, no one can gainsay the truth of all you say, and, speaking for the three of us, and we represent the country, I am sure that we value your services as Overlord, though your bookish ways are beyond us——"

"Ah!" I interrupted, "but you have not seen all my books. Now I am sure that if you looked through my copy of *Elephantis*—— Where is my copy? I always keep it right there. That dog of a page must have taken it. Anyway, I anticipate that you would have keen enjoyment from its inspection."

"That may be, but we are not monks. None of us understand the art of reading."

"You do not have to read. The book of *Elephantis* is simply one of pictures."

"That would be different. But to go on where Your Worship broke into my argument. We like you, and value your ability to rule a country, but what will happen to us should you die, of the Black Plague or of the Pox? You have, as far as we know, neither kith nor kin, and, being unmarried, no children to render your dynasty secure. This is why we come here. To urge your marriage."

I lost no time in making the answer.

"This is no new problem to me, my lords. I know that I owe it to my country to marry and have children, sturdy sons to carry the burden and beautiful daughters to make fortunate alliances. But how can I marry? I am wise but not wise enough to select a wife from among the beautiful virgins of Cornwall. I met Elenore, daughter of Sir Bevidere, and lost my heart to her, but the next day Sir Arthur rode by with his daughter Helen, and I realized that she was blond where Elenore was brunette. Then, the same week chance led me to the home of Sir Mallory, and his daughter Guinevere graced the banquet table. Tell me, my lords, with three such beauties to choose from, how can a man decide? Shall I take Helen and offend the fathers of Elenore and Guinevere? If I marry Elenore, how can I bear to keep the mystical beauties of the other two graces from haunting my nights? That is why I am still a bachelor. Am I right? Only by remaining single can I keep my beloved knights at peace and these darling girls at least with some degree of hope, for so long as I am single I am the rightful property of any woman brilliant enough to win me."

Sir Arthur smiled:

"Very clever. That speech is on a par with your general performance since dropping into our country from nowhere. We know how you feel. You want to be fair with all of us. But at the same

time you must marry. I hear that you are a worker of magic; that by your demoniacal powers you became Overlord, and later on secured the friendship of Ireland by removing the tail from the husband of Queen Broda. We are asking you to use this magic in selecting your bride. To the west of this castle, in the dark forest, centering a fairy ring is a bride well. A single man looking into that well, sees the face of his future bride. We will gather there, the Cornwall nobles and their eligible daughters. You will look into the well, compare the picture you see there with the lovely damsels, and announce your decision. It is an ancient custom, and, as we know you are honest, will provide a satisfactory answer to our dilemma. For many hundred years our Overlords have thus selected their brides. So, the next night of the full moon we will gather there, with a priest, and the selection and the marriage will all be the work of a few minutes. Are you satisfied with the plan?"

"It is perfect," I replied. "It has all of the elements of white magic of the finest sort."

"Then," said Arthur, "Bevidere and I will be riding on through the night. Mallory remains, I understand. He hath a wife that is a shrew and the poor lad lets no opportunity slip to remain a night away from her, especially when he hath a leman with him." So saying he slapped Sir Mallory on the back, laughed heartily at his discomfort, and he and Sir Bevidere went out into the night.

"'Tis an odd way of selecting a Queen," I remarked.

"So it is," agreed the grizzled old knight, "but hath no more gamble to it than any other way. Hundreds of years ago, 'tis said that the nobility gathered to see the selection of the bride, and when the Overlord looked into the well, there he saw, instead of a reflection of a woman, a real woman, named Melusina, a daughter of a French fay, called Pressina, and she, coming from the well, demanded that she become the Queen and none could gainsay her right. They married, and, her clothing off, the poor Overlord found that she was half woman and half snake. It was a great scandal, and created new styles in clothes and slippers. Many women claimed to be deformed just to be in the style."

"Horrible! But how came she in the well?"

"No doubt placed herself there to marry the Overlord. Ha! Ha! It would be bad for that old tale to be spread over Cornwall just now. A dozen wells would not hold the lovely women who covet you." And the old rogue poked me in my royal ribs, as he drank another horn of wine. At last I had him taken to his room, there to be cared for by his leman.

As soon as he left I called for Percy. I wanted to know where my copy of *Elephantis* was. As I suspected, she had taken it with her when she left the library; and all the time I thought she was studying her letters. I scolded her:

"How can you ever hope to become learned when you look at such pictures instead of studying your letters?"

"I do not want to become learned," she sulked.

"What do you want to become?" I demanded.

But she simply started to cry; so I cuffed her on the ear and bade her begone for the night. It would be one week before the night of the full moon. If I was going to have a wife, then the best place for Percy, or Ruth, or whatever his or her name was, well, anyway, the best place for her to be would be back in Wales. So, I waited till morning and had a palfrey packed with silken gowns and jewels and placed her on an-

other pony in charge of two of my most trusty men-at-arms, and sent her on her way.

"Go back and marry your old Jew," I said roughly. "And be an honest woman and the mother of children and cease your nonsense and your odd ways."

"I don't believe you want me any more," she said rather seriously, and the way she looked at me and pursed her lips made me regret that I had done as I had.

"It is not that," I said in self-defense, "but I am the Overlord of a great country and I must marry and start a dynasty; so on your way, and occasionally think kindly of me, Ruth."

So off she went back to Wales, and I thought that I was well rid of a dangerous situation; for, now that I was to marry and settle down, there was only one way for me to live and that was as an example to my people, and a model of faithfulness and sobriety.

THE next week was a busy one. I kept open house. All of the nobility called, at least for a meal. There were gruff fathers and solicitous mothers and beautiful daughters, almost without number. Any bachelor who could not pick a bride from these Cornwall beauties was indeed hard to please. Naturally, there was effort made to influence me—gifts, private interviews, little intrigues of every nature; but I was able to act so wisely that when the night of the full moon came, every one of the lovely candidates and all of their relatives were satisfied that I would act fairly and be influenced only by the most honest comparison with the image in the well and the lady whom this image most resembled.

The Priest was there. I was rather troubled when I saw that Priest, for, in spite of his sacerdotal robes, he resembled closely the man who had conquered in the Battle of the Toads, the mighty magician who had granted me my three wishes and made me Overlord of Cornwall. He saw that I suspected him and he gave me the sign of the Brethren and then I knew him to be my friend, and felt satisfied that he would so influence my choice that naught but happiness would result therefrom. Sir Bevidere was there and Arthur and fifty other loving fathers. It would be a hard choice, and I was glad that a Master Magician had a hand in the affair.

We waited rather anxiously while the full moon rose. Of course none approached the well. That right was reserved for me, and I was not to look therein till the moon was directly above it. It was a silent, serious gathering, every one hoping against hope and each of them hoping something different. They could not all be right. Only one lovely woman could become bride and Queen.

I trembled a little. That was from the chill night air. At the same time it was not an easy matter, even for a hardened adventurer, to go through the program of the night. Suppose I should be forced to select Sir Mallory's daughter? I knew his wife, and there was no reason to think that the daughter would be different. Oh, well! If the worst came to the worst, I could go hunting gerrymanders in Ethiopia.

At last the Priest, who seemed to be acting as Master of Ceremonies, called for silence and bade me walk forward to the well. The moon was now directly over the ancient hole. Trembling, I looked in, and at once covered my dazzled eyes. Then I took a step backward.

"Did you see an image therein?" asked the Priest.

"I did."

"Then from these lovely virgins select

the one whose image you saw in the Bride Well."

"I can not! She resembleth none of these waiting ladies."

My people murmured when they heard me. It was a hard thing I said and one they could not understand. But I waved my hand regally as I demanded silence.

"Here is a magical happening," I cried. "There is no image in the well, but rather a real woman. Priest, bid her come forth and tell her name and station in life. Have her explain how comes she here."

The Priest did so. In seven different languages and five distant dialects he called down the well to the one in the well to come forth. She came; slowly, almost as though floating upward she came, stepping gracefully over the stone curbing, came toward me and made a deep curtsy, and then, in clean commanding voice, she spake:

"I am Leonora.
Royal daughter
Of most royal parents.
I come from a land most noble,
Among men renowned.
That tract of earth is not
Over mid-earth
Fellow to many peopled lands,
But is a celestial Paradise.
Beautiful is all that land,
With delight blest.
I come from there to Cornwall,
To mate with him who reigns,
And shower love and riches
All over his domain."

Then, stretching her hand toward me, she cried to the Priest:

"Marry us forthwith, so we can, united, bless this fair land of Cornwall and its beloved people. Why should I care about leaving Paradise when I can spend an eternity in Cornwall?"

She was regal. From the golden crown which held her glorious locks together down to the silver slippers on her little feet she was a rare mate for any Overlord. Something of this must have impressed my people. Perhaps they felt that it was a happy ending to what might have turned out to be a difficult situation. At least they cried aloud their approval of the marriage.

But through the forest came the sound of silvery horns, and the neighing of horses and the dull roll of chariots. Who should it be but Queen Broda in her golden chariot with my friend, and her husband by her side? What fortunate magic secured her arrival at this time? I looked at the Priest and he winked at me. Good! With such a partner I would go far.

"Hail, Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall! Hail and thrice hail! I heard that you were adventuring into the land of matrimony tonight, and if this lady by your side is your bride, then your adventurings will be sweet indeed. But you have many maidens here who are unwed. It came to me to select fifty of my young nobles and offer them in marriage to your lovely girls. With such marriages the friendship of Ireland and Cornwall will be truly made too strong to break."

Then into the moonlight came fifty Irishmen in purple robes and golden armlets and gold chains around their necks and golden curls on their heads, and between them it was hard to choose. The Cornwall maidens could hardly wait till proper introductions were made. Then by the same magic that had ruled the entire evening, the couples instantly fell in love, and agreements were soon made so that after an hour of merrymaking there were fifty-one couples to be married by the Priest instead of one.

NATURALLY, every one went away happy. I entertained as many as I could in my Castle, but at last came the hour when I was alone with my bride. She had slipped off her regal robes and placed upon her lovely body a silken gown that showed in every part the truth

of her statement that she had come from Paradise. I determined to be stern with her. Now was the time to find out who was to rule.

"Why did you do it?" I asked.

"Why should I not? That night when Sir Mallory talked to you I hid behind the velvet curtains. What one woman can do, another can. You gave me the dresses and jewels and I made up my mind to use them. Of course, you remember the poem? You taught me that yourself and I just made a few changes in it."

"I recognized the poetry at once," I admitted. "I read it to you from the Exeter Book and the name of it is *De Phoenice*. Of course, it was clever of you and you looked more than beautiful as you rose out of the well."

"Of course, I had to practise that. It was rather hard to climb the ladder, but I would do anything for you, Cecil dear. And it all ended just perfectly lovely. Just like one of those stories you used to read to me."

She smiled at me so sweetly, she clung to me so graciously, she looked so adoringly into my eyes that all my reserve melted. I crushed her to me.

"Oh, Ruth, Ruth! I am so glad that it happened the way it did. No other woman would have had the courage to do it. I am glad that you are going to be my Queen. I do not believe that I shall ever be able to stop kissing you."

We heard a little laugh. Turning, we faced the Priest.

"I just dropped in to say good-bye, and wish you all kinds of happiness. You are going far in the world, Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall, with such a woman for your wife. By the way, would you mind if I borrowed your copy of *Elephantis*? There is a Cardinal in Italy, a friend of mine, who has expressed the desire to see it."

"That is all right," I answered. "Just take it with you. Now that Ruth and I are married, I do not believe I shall care to spend as much time with *Elephantis* as I did."

"You are going to find me much nicer," cooed Ruth, as she clung closer to me.

A Short Weird Tale

MRS. BENTLEY'S DAUGHTER

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

SAUK CITY was sweltering in the July sun. The warm, dusty air was lifeless, and in the heat of early afternoon the green of the trees was lost in the dull gray haze. The drooping flowers made curious splotches of color around Mrs. Vaile's porch; there was the light pink of late roses, the red of garden carnations, the orange and yellow of nasturtiums, and the deep blue of canterbury-bells and clematis, that crept up along the porch floor and trailed along over the rail and the pillar.

The door of her house opened, and

Mrs. Vaile herself came out upon the porch. She was dressed for the street, and as she came out she drew on her white gloves, holding her sunshade close to her body with the pressure of her elbow. She had trouble with the gloves and finally put the sunshade down to get at them better. One was already on, and the other half-way on, when she drew them both off again and flung them to a chair on the porch.

"It's too hot to wear them, anyway," she said.

Then she raised her sunshade and stepped out into the sun. A car came down the road and swung around the corner in a perfect storm of dust.

"Land's sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Vaile. "Never saw such dust." She reflected that unless they had rain soon, the house and the flowers would soon be a dusty brown. She turned and looked at the flowers, bent away from the sun.

Then she went on her way, marching sedately down the walk and out upon the street. From the shade of her parasol she looked over at the house that was her destination. She should really have called sooner, she reflected, it being her place as a new neighbor to do so. Oh! well. She crossed the dirt road with little, mincing steps and came up before the white-washed fence about the house. She opened the gate and began to walk up the path toward the house.

Then she saw the child. It was sitting on the stone curb of an old, evidently unused well, for the opening was neither covered over nor marked with the paraphernalia of usage. The child was playing about, quite dangerously, too, Mrs. Vaile thought. It was a little girl, Mrs. Vaile saw as she came closer. What if she should fall into the well? The thought sent Mrs. Vaile from her path over to the child.

"Hello, darling," said Mrs. Vaile in her kindest voice.

The child looked up at her. "Oh!" she said.

"Does your mother know you're out here, sitting at the well?" asked Mrs. Vaile, leaning slightly forward.

"Mama doesn't care."

Mrs. Vaile puckered her brow. She smiled a bewildered smile, and looked more closely at the child. The little girl smiled back at her.

"I don't think you ought to sit on the curb there, darling; you might fall into the well."

The child turned its head slightly and looked down into the well. She laughed gayly and tossed her curls. Then she shook her head.

"I can't fall down into the well," said the child simply.

Mrs. Vaile glanced nervously toward the house, half expecting the child's mother to come out to her. She thought it very odd that they should leave the well uncovered with a child about the house. Once more she entreated the child.

"Do come with me to your mother, won't you? Come to the house with me."

"Oh, no, I couldn't. I must stay here." The child shook her head vehemently.

Mrs. Vaile sighed. "Oh! very well, then." She picked her way over the grass back to the walk and went on up toward the house. She mounted the porch steps and rang the bell; then she looked back at the child. Somewhat unruly, that girl; Mrs. Vaile felt it.

Then suddenly she saw her neighbor's smiling face framed in the doorway, and in a moment she was sitting in a rather old-fashioned parlor—there were so many of them in Sauk City, she had been told. The walls were papered with light tan paper, on which were great red splotches of flowers—almost gaudy, thought Mrs.

Vaile—but she was smiling at her hostess who was saying something about her flowers. The horsehair furniture felt very odd, somehow. Across from her on the mantel she saw several old chromos. On one of these she saw three people—a woman, a man—her husband, no doubt—and a child. The woman was her hostess, and the child was the child on the well curb. A family group, thought Mrs. Vaile. She turned to her hostess now, and smiled as if she had heard and appreciated every word that had dimly come to her.

"I know I should have come sooner, but I was frightfully busy. Moving, you know. And if it hadn't been for your adorable little girl, whom I saw on the well curb as I came in——"

Mrs. Vaile stopped suddenly. There was a sudden odd pallor on the face of her hostess. She heard the woman saying, more to herself than to her:

"On the well curb again?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Vaile affably. "She was sitting there quite pertly, and answered me when I spoke to her."

"Ah!" the woman exclaimed, and leaned forward. "And what did she say?"

Mrs. Vaile hesitated. Would it do to tell this woman that she had reprimanded her child? "Not much, certainly not," said Mrs. Vaile. "I told her I thought she hadn't ought to sit on the well curb, but she said you didn't mind; so I came on in."

"Ah! yes. Dorothy was always like that. A bit unruly, perhaps, just a little bit. But such a dear, and such a comfort to me. She comes and she goes, but she seems to like the well curb best. It's a bit extraordinary, too, when you come to think of it."

Mrs. Vaile thought her hostess was becoming steadily more incoherent; she thought it best to change the subject. She led off on the last meeting of the Ladies' Aid, and her hostess entered into this topic with fervor.

It was after five when Mrs. Vaile emerged from the house. She saw as she came down the path that the child was no longer at the well. She was most probably playing in the dense bushes to the left, from which came the shrill screaming of a group of children at play. Behind her, the woman was leaning over the porch railing and staring at the well.

She closed the gate after her, and stepped briskly across the street. It was at her doorstep that she met Mrs. Walters, from the other end of the block. Mrs. Vaile did not like Mrs. Walters; she had been warned that Mrs. Walters was an accomplished gossip, and she detested gossips. But she was already coming to feel that gossiping was one of the few means of passing the time in Sauk City.

She greeted Mrs. Walters, and the woman responded with a sharp nod.

"Have you been visiting Mrs. Bentley?" she asked.

Mrs. Vaile nodded. "Yes. We have had a very pleasant chat about"—she could not tell this woman that they had been discussing the Ladies' Aid—"about Mrs. Bentley's daughter, Dorothy."

Mrs. Walters jerked her head about and stared at Mrs. Vaile in open-eyed astonishment.

"Do you tell me she talks about her?" she demanded.

"Why, yes," answered Mrs. Vaile. "After I saw the girl on the well curb——"

"Saw the girl on the well curb!" Mrs. Walters almost screamed the words; she seemed to be leaning away from Mrs. Vaile, and at the same time boring her eyes into her.

Mrs. Vaile was nonplussed. What had she said now? Dear me! she thought, what a queer person! But something Mrs. Walters was saying brought her up sharply.

"How you talk, Mrs. Vaile! Why, that girl fell into the well over a year ago. I can't believe that Mrs. Bentley would talk about it!"

Mrs. Vaile nodded. "It is rather queer, isn't it? If a daughter of mine fell into the well once, I'd be sure not to let her play around it again. But there she was, smart as you please, sitting right on top of the well curb!"

"What *are* you saying, Mrs. Vaile?" asked Mrs. Walters coldly. Then, in a voice that seemed to come from far away, "Surely you know that the child died when it fell into the well!"

FUNGI · from · YUGGOTH

By H.P. LOVECRAFT

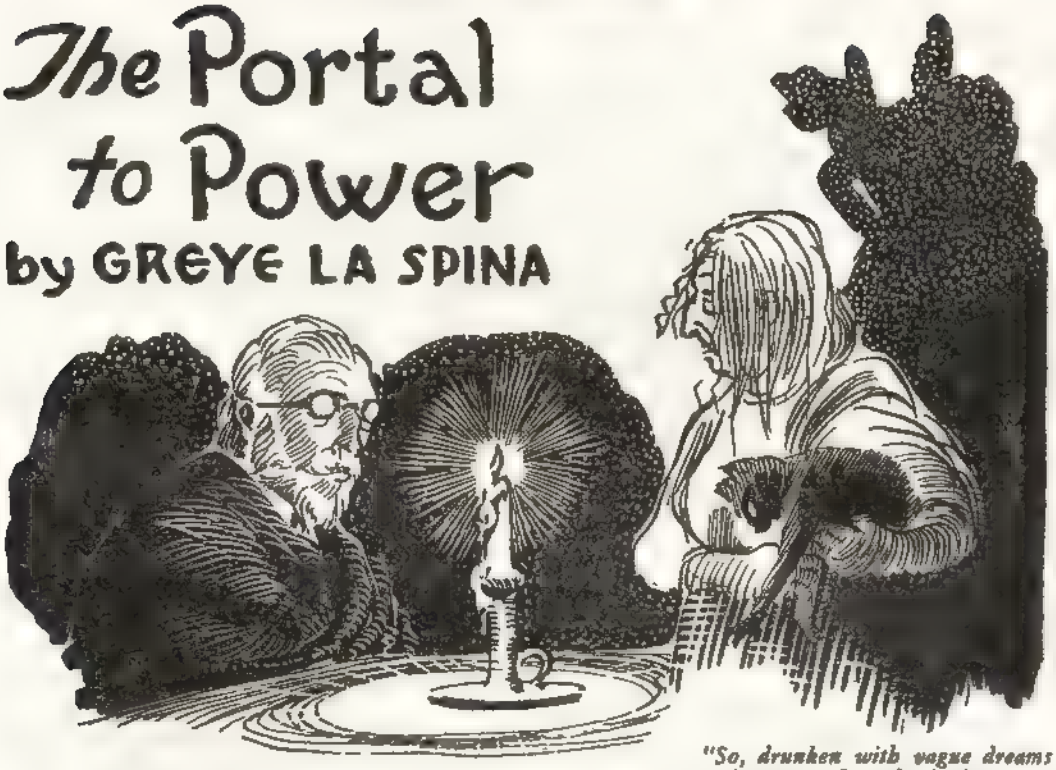
3. HESPERIA

The winter sunset, flaming beyond spires
And chimneys half-detached from this dull sphere,
Opens great gates to some forgotten year
Of elder splendors and divine desires.
Expectant wonders burn in those rich fires,
Adventure-fraught, and not untinged with fear;
A row of sphinxes where the way leads clear
Toward walls and turrets quivering to far lyres.

It is the land where beauty's meaning flowers;
Where every unplaced memory has a source;
Where the great river Time begins its course
Down the vast void in starlit streams of hours.
Dreams bring us close—but ancient lore repeats
That human tread has never soiled these streets.

The Portal to Power

by GREYE LA SPINA



"So, drunken with vague dreams of power, I stole it from my demon lover."

CHAPTER 1

THERE was a slim horned moon sailing through the murky sky, across which ragged gray clouds scudded as if bent on secret missions. The dry October air was full of the subdued whistling of windy gusts that burst unexpectedly from one side or another, whipping the mantled cloak of the old doctor away from his meager, wiry body. Underlying those occasional sibilant whines of tearing wind was a boding silence that John Peabody disliked.

Fifty years of medical service to all sorts of people under every possible condition had intensified his natural intuitiveness; he had become peculiarly sensitive to psychic impressions. To him the night was uncanny. Upon its beating wings the wind bore dark influences from which the old man shrank distastefully. Nor did the appearance of Hannah Wake's place serve as a sedative to his tingling nerves.

The tumbledown shanty that had, in wretched fashion, sheltered the old woman as far back as the doctor could remember looked more than ordinarily eery under the dim, reluctant light of that fragile moon, precariously hurdling the clouds in the dark sky. The hovel, once a pretty cottage covered with innocent climbing roses (just as Hannah Wake had once worn the graces of vivacious, charming girlhood), was now reduced to ugliness by age, neglect, and other subtler forces, at thought of which the old man winced; for he had seen that pretty young Hannah altered horribly by the same mysterious powers into a hideous and loathsome hag, pointed at in the village as a witch, and avoided by all save evil-dispositioned persons whose malevolent personal motives drove them to brave

the night terrors of that grinning warlock in her own background.

The doctor had walked; his modest coupé was undergoing repairs, and it was less than a mile out of the village. He was carrying his black bag and was further burdened by a small brown paper parcel such as small-town stores use for wrapping food. He paused at the broken-down gate, that creaked dismally on its broken hinges, gave an impatient sigh, and scowled at the unpleasantness of his surroundings.

"Dirty night," commented the doctor aloud, and grunted with disgust as he picked his way through the tall weeds that covered his mantle with burrs and stickers as he pushed among those usurpers of the once neat flagstone path. His footsteps echoed dully, making a kind of ominous clamor in the hushes of the whistling gale.

At his approach, the door of the hovel swung silently open, disclosing a yawning and oppressive gulf of blackness beyond the threshold. No sound greeted the doctor's ears. He hesitated perceptibly before plunging into that heavy murk, apparently untenanted. His feet dragged reluctantly, but his powerful will swept him along. As he stepped inside he spoke, scornful protest in his level tones.

"Hannah! It is quite unnecessary to play your silly tricks on me. I know you too well."

A kind of hysterical gurgle welled uncannily out of the inner murk. "Hush . . ." was pushed at him. Then the door slammed at his very heels.

At sound of the bolt sliding home, the doctor started violently and whirled about, thrusting his right hand out to grasp the person who had shut off his retreat. The swirling of the close air as he moved told him that his groping hand had been purposely evaded. Again he spoke sharply:

"Hannah! Don't be an utter fool."

The reply was the crackle of a match struck briskly, and the individual who lighted the candle standing on a rickety table in the middle of the room paid no attention to her guest, but shielded the flickering flame's slow growth with solicitous hands. From under her left elbow, which held the beast strained to her side, a thin black cat squawled querulously. In one shadowy corner a dog yelped eerily. The growing light swelled up behind gross fingers, illuminating with play of shadow and high-light the hideous countenance of the old woman bending above it.

Doctor Peabody pushed his shell-rimmed bifocal spectacles farther up on his aristocratic nose and cast a flashing glance about the miserable room, taking in with that shrewd look of comprehension the pallet of old rags upon a mattress of straw; the handful of picked-over nuts on the table; and the wretched, starved-looking black cat that mewed occasionally as if in protest, from its dangling position over the old woman's left arm.

"On a blustering night like this, after I've had a trying day, you send for me, Hannah," reproached the doctor, still standing near the door, the black bag on the floor at his feet. "Had I found you sick——"

"Sickness would be nothing in comparison with my reason for calling you here tonight," Hannah Wake defended herself with heavy significance. Her thick lips parted over toothless gums as she added in a hoarse whisper: "Tonight . . . the messenger comes."

"The messenger?" fumbled the old physician in puzzled fashion, then suddenly wrinkling up his aquiline nose with distaste as he fathomed his hostess's hidden meaning. "Hannah, you make me sick with your foolishness. The

first chance I've had in two weeks to get a night's sleep, and you drag me out here for nothing."

"Who says it is for nothing?" flashed the sybil, unhealthily fat cheeks wabbling as she nodded a disheveled gray head at the doctor violently. Her small black eyes narrowed until they became mere slits under her heavy eyebrows.

"*I* say it, Hannah. I come because you represent yourself as being on the verge of death, and here I find you as lively as ever you've been in all your life," the physician reproached. He leaned over, picked up the black bag, and continued, as he stepped back toward the bolted door: "Next time you send for me, make sure you need me, or I'll disregard any future calls from you."

LIKE some agile creature of those native wilds, the old woman interposed her horrid wabbly body between her irritated visitor and easy egress.

"The door is bolted. Wait! Listen! I swear to you that never in all the history of the world has there been such an occasion as now lies in your hand, to save your fellow creatures from such vile conditions as even you, with your dabbling into the occult, can never have dreamed."

The doctor drew a long, impatient breath, and bent keenly searching, if faded, blue eyes through the shell-rimmed spectacles upon that weird, gesticulating figure.

"Ah! Now I have your attention, John Peabody. . . . I bolted the door, not to keep you in, but to keep out . . . others . . . until I was ready to give admission. Listen, and for the sake of all you hold most precious, do not interrupt me, for every moment counts. You know what I am——" and that harsh, disagreeably modulated voice hesitated, while the old woman's beady black orbs fell before the honest blue eyes that gazed with that air of arrested attention at her mouthing, at the writhing of her misshapen, ugly features. "Old witch, Devil's light-o'-love, they call me, eh? Well, they're not so far from being right, John Peabody." Her shrill laugh started on a hysterical note, then checked itself almost apprehensively.

"Hannah!" rebuked the old man sternly.

Her gesture carried such frantic appeal that the intended reproach died on the thin, compressed lips. The doctor pushed his heavy-rimmed spectacles again into position and stared intently at that forlorn creature without speaking further or making a move to leave the cottage.

"Listen! May the Powers of Light help the world if you don't!" wailed the haggard being before him. "The time is all too short, and there is too much to tell. Somehow . . . my soul was the price, believe it or not . . . a certain talisman passed into my possession, mine until the messenger should come for it when my time would be upon me. Tonight he comes. Hush! Do not interrupt. Let me tell you what I can, quickly.

"There is in America a company of men and women banded together with the set purpose of bringing back the ancient gods into their pristine power. All they need now to consummate their plans is this talisman, and the messenger who comes tonight is to receive it from me and take it to them. This must not be!" grated the crone, a kind of burning desperation glowing in her narrowed black eyes.

"Hannah Wake, what has this to do with you? Or me?" demanded the doctor with severity. "Your life has not been such that I can so credulously accept your apparent change of heart." He shook his head ponderously, the white hair haloed about his tranquil brow. "No, woman. No."

"I tell you, John Peabody, that this

talisman has tremendous possibilities for good or evil. Once it is in the hands of that company of blindly mistaken men and women, it can bring upon the world unimaginable horrors of moral degradation. For God's——" and she flung one hand to her flabby throat as if choking, then recovered herself with an effort. "Can't say it," she muttered, eyes downcast.

"For God's sake, Hannah Wake?" the doctor affirmed, rather than asked.

She nodded, wild gray locks straggling about her hollow eye-sockets.

"Why this sudden right-about-face?" demanded the old man searchingly. "After a life spent in service to evil, what is it you can ask *me* to do now?"

She pointed puffy hands at her bosom, uttering a horrid cackling laugh that again bordered on the hysterical. Yet with all the evidence of nervous tension, she restrained the sounds of her mirth that it might not be heard outside the hovel. The doctor observed her sharply; nothing escaped that keen gaze.

"You see what I am today? I was promised the lover I yearned for, when I was young and gay; I was told that I would be able to keep him mine as long as I lived and loved. I was promised wealth, position, everything the world holds dear. Yet . . . so subtle is the deterioration of the moral fiber when it is attacked by a fiend . . . I became persuaded that even these things were as naught to the evil powers I might wield, if I would——" and she broke off.

Then: "Look at me now! Look at me, I say!" The hoarse voice went shrill, but shrill with a caution that spoke to the observant physician of possibly listening ears that might be unfriendly. "Fooled! Cheated! Ruined, and for nothing!"

Hannah Wake caught up the candle and held that pallid illumination before her, so that its heavy shadows accented her almost unhuman ugliness, the loathsomeness of her unhealthily swollen and neglected body.

"Ah, you shrink from what you see. Think, then, how I must hate him who promised me all that I have told you, and then rewarded me with . . . this!" And the sweeping gesture included ugly body, miserable pallet upon the floor, rickety table.

"And how was it done, you may ask, to fool me into giving up my youth and freshness without making sure of what had been promised me? My Prince was devilishly clever. He showed me the Philosopher's Stone, and told me its divine properties; how it was the portal to superhuman power over all living creatures, and even, to a certain extent, over the divine energy itself that flows like unchained electricity throughout the entire universe.

"He replaced the stone in his bosom, and I thought he slept. But it was only to trap me that he feigned slumber. The stone must be *given,* if it is to retain all its extraordinary properties, and I knew full well he would never give it. . . . So, drunken with vague dreams of power, I stole it from my demon lover as he seemed to sleep. All was as he had craftily planned.

"So because I had taken it and it was not given, certain doors of higher power were closed to me that I had thought would be mine when I possessed the stone, and other doors of inimitable evil flung themselves open, and into my soul trooped that which has made me what I am."

An involuntary ejaculation of pity escaped the lips of the tense listener.

"I have harbored hate within this hideous tenement until it has transformed my soul into a seething cauldron of torment. Hate, John Peabody, such as your calm spirit could never apprehend. It has made

me cunning. It has made me careless of all but one thing."

"And that?" the old man prompted in a tense voice, his fine lips firmly together but drawn downward in an irrepressible expression of pity for that tormented soul which raged and triumphed before him.

"To thwart my destroyer, if only for a time or in a single thing," replied Hannah Wake shortly, her small black eyes reflecting the hidden fires that burned within her.

"Can you do it?" demanded John Peabody, suddenly alert, his finer senses warning him of something beyond the tangible that lurked in the strange situation forced upon him.

"Yes, I can. With your help I can withhold the talisman from the messenger. If I can manage to have it safely conveyed to the Circle of Light in San Francisco, I can postpone, at least, the ruin which the Old Gods, once unleashed, would bring upon the world."

Her husky voice whispered it, thrusting her hideous face up at the doctor, nodding until the gray witch lock flew wildly about, coiling and uncoiling over her shoulder like venomous pale snakes.

"How can this be done?" demanded the old man practically.

She thrust at him the half-starved feline thing which she had been holding securely under her arm all the time.

"It is a small thing, that talisman," she whispered. And then, irrelevantly: "When the messenger comes for me, I would like you to take care of my cat for me. Will you promise? Even my cat will be able to do the world a service after I'm gone," and the crone grinned toothlessly.

At this belated human tenderness, the old doctor promised. Something of good remained, he told himself, even in what seemed absolutely evil on the surface.

"You will take my cat to the Master of the Circle of Light. He will know what to do with it."

"And who, my good Hannah, will pay my expenses and the cat's to California?" asked the doctor whimsically. "I am only a poor country practitioner, you must remember."

"The devil would have found a way to have paid *my* fare, had I chosen to join that band. Fools! They do not know that they are catspaws. They are blind to all but their own wild dreams. Like me, they will be used, then flung aside to perish miserably.

"John Peabody, He who condemns me now to fire and brimstone because I have served His enemies" ("No, Hannah, no!") "He will provide the way to save His world. My heart betrays me. I offer Him my last gift. I give Him back His creatures out of the hands of the Ancient Ones," the sybil whispered tensely, with fearful significance. "He knows, if you do not, that tonight the peoples of the entire world lie in the hands of humble Hannah Wake, because she was once loved by a Prince of Evil."

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when a thundering knock sounded upon the panels of the door.

CHAPTER 2

IT WAS as if an automaton had been suddenly galvanized into a habitual line of motion. Hannah Wake sprang across the room with a lithe purposefulness belying her appearance of age and decay.

Her right hand pulled at a fine silken cord about her throat, a thread that until now had lain hidden in the folds of unhealthy flesh. She broke the cord with a jerk and slid from it something that fell shimmering with opalescence into the candle-light.

"The meat . . . did you bring the meat?"

Her left elbow gripped yet more securely the unfortunate cat, that yowled eerily, struggling in vain against her strong hold. Hannah Wake, with a gesture to call the doctor's closest attention, pressed that glowing two-inch-long oval stone down into a strip of meat which she hastily shook out of the brown paper parcel the doctor had surrendered at her husky demand. Releasing the squawling cat, she pushed it upon the table before that tempting morsel.

The half-starved animal sniffed in a kind of ecstasy. Stretching its thin neck into a long line of allurement, it struck the meat toward it with one paw, then gulped it down eagerly and looked for more tidbits.

"Here," whispered Hannah Wake, and pressed the black beast into the doctor's astonished hands.

"The talisman?" he said softly, marvelling.

"For this I starved my poor Grimalkin," responded the old hag craftily. "Who will bother your cat, carried along in a basket? Once you have safely arrived, the Master will know what to do."

"But where can I find him? And how?"

Again interruption. That authoritative pounding on the hovel door.

"Back! Into the dark. And wait."

The doctor retreated unwillingly, the squirming feline beast in his arms under a restraining fold of his cape. A dark corner swallowed him from sight as Hannah went to the door and unbolted it. It swung open. Into the dim candle-light strode a burly form, before which the old woman fell back a few steps.

"Quint!" uttered the doctor in a low murmur from his dark corner, quite involuntarily, for the shock of the recognition had taken him unawares.

"Who called my name?" demanded the newcomer, halting, muscular arms across broad chest. Eerily flashing eyes regarded the old woman in the flicker of the candle's bending flame.

For a passing moment Doctor Peabody debated as to whether he ought to disclose himself or not. The decision was snatched from him by the prompt reply of the ancient sybil, who muttered hoarsely and derisively:

"Who could have spoken, if not I?"

"But, my name——?" hesitated the newcomer suspiciously.

"Think you that because Azazel wishes his talisman in other hands that I become automatically a weak, unseeing human thing? No, messenger." The bent figure straightened with almost unhuman pride and the close-set black eyes shot fiery glances upon the newcomer.

"Ah, yes, the talisman. Give it to me," demanded the young man, extending a hand that trembled with some emotion that could not have been fear, for that sturdy young body was brawny and the gaze of those eyes determined.

What a Quint was this! thought the doctor, marvelling. The Quint who had been his handy man for the past few months had always seemed a gentle, melancholy youth. This Quint bore himself, and spoke, like a prince of the blood. Strange . . . passing strange. The old physician drew each breath cautiously; his sunken blue eyes were bent keenly through his spectacles upon the oddly assorted pair. Nothing escaped that ancient eagle's gaze.

"Ah, the talisman!" mocked the old woman. Her thick lips parted, bubbled by sneering laughter. "So you are the messenger? What sign do you bring me?"

"Evohe, Pan!" cried out the young man, an exultant ring in his voice, and he flung both hands before him in a kind of salutation, palms upraised.

"Evohe, Pan!" echoed the old woman's ironical tones. "Aye, it would be Pan . . . at first."

She looked beyond the newcomer into the darkness where stood the old doctor.

"Yes, you have the password. Those are the words that are the 'open sesame' to the temple of the ancient gods. Messenger, I give you welcome, although your coming spells disaster for Hannah Wake."

The young man made an impatient gesture.

"The talisman," he repeated sharply.

In his dark corner the old doctor stood motionless, drawing his mantle closer about the black cat that had now cuddled down contentedly against his warm body, its head rubbing purringly against him.

Hannah fumbled in her bosom among the soiled rags that so inadequately covered her body. She drew something from that hiding-place.

The doctor peered through the dimness with piercing gaze. Had she been playing her tricks upon him, or was it upon Quint that she practised them?

The man stretched out his hand eagerly but she withheld the small silken bag from him, shaking her head in decided negation.

"Do not be over-anxious," she snapped, and faded into a dark corner, from which she presently dragged by a frayed cord about its neck a small, miserable-looking hound pup. "Mark me, messenger."

From the table she took a piece of the raw beef, and upon it let slip something milky white from the silken pouch. The young man started forward with a sharp cry, but before he could reach her, the hag had laid that fragment of meat before the pup, which snapped it up and looked avidly for more.

"Are you mad, old witch?" demanded the youth furiously, his breath coming hard between clenched teeth.

She regarded him with a sneer.

"No more than I have ever been, and perhaps less," retorted she. "Fool, who will bother with your hound pup as you go on your way? Believe me, I know which is the safest mode of carrying the talisman."

Quint appeared to cogitate for a moment.

"When you are there, the dog can die and deliver up to you the talisman."

"There may be something in what you have done," admitted Quint unwillingly. "But if you are playing any trick, old woman, you will live to regret it."

She laughed hoarsely.

"Messenger, you will know in time that although I pass tonight or tomorrow into the shades, yet was I once beloved by Azazel, and still possess enough power to protect myself, even from you and those who sent you," declared the sybil with deep gravity. "Go now. I wish to die in peace. Such peace as I can expect," she ended.

A thin screech of eldritch laughter set the doctor's spinal column a-tingle, back there in the dark.

Another thought seemed to strike the visitor.

"Why did you send for Doctor Peabody to visit you?" he asked with suspicion in his dark eyes.

"Because I hoped he would give my poor Grimalkin a home after I went," whined the old woman.

Quint laughed in a not unfriendly fashion.

"I must be on my way before he comes. As for you, you have too many kindly thoughts, old witch. Perhaps Azazel's hold on you is not as close as you fear."

"I have consulted my teraph," whispered old Hannah, crouching against the table, her voice mysterious. She gave a strange, lingering look about her. "It tells me that before I pass I shall have done mankind a great benefit."

"The teraph is right, witch," affirmed the messenger tersely.

Doctor Peabody, motionless, pressed against the wall in the dark, thought he felt those piercing young eyes upon himself and hardly dared to breathe, until to one side of him he observed a small and ugly image standing in a niche in the wall, obscenely suggestive of ancient phallic worship. His nose wrinkled distastefully.

"Azazel's talisman, that in his hands could create evil only, shall bring laughter and gay light-heartedness back to the earth in the hands of Pan's high priestess, Evohe, Pan!"

With what confidence that hale young voice rang out!

Old Hannah's ancient frame was seized by a long shudder.

"Messenger," she began, picking her words with difficulty, "I am not yet sure that you yourself have been instructed properly as to what end that Stone of Mystery is to be applied. Laughter and honest living do not follow in its train, unless——" and her voice faltered.

Quint eyed her with obvious scorn and a kind of lofty pity.

"Witch, be assured that the high priest has been initiated into the properties of the talisman. Harken! Pan himself dwells among us today."

"No!"

Quint laughed softly.

"Then it is from Pan that the high priest has received his instruction?" groaned the old woman.

"The gods have chosen a monstrous form for his manifestation, but we will offer him a fairer body ere long. Give me the pup. I go, witch. May your passing be easy, for you have done the world a great benefit."

With these words he whirled about and opened the door, which the night wind had pushed closed behind him. He was gone, then, into the outer murk of that eery night.

THE sound of his motorcycle drifted in between the increasing gusts of the gale, for gale it had now grown to be. As these sounds faded away into the night, Doctor Peabody moved out into the circle of candle-light, his blue eyes sternly interrogating the old woman who still crouched against the rickety table.

"What does all this nonsense mean? It sounds like the crazy revival of some ancient obscene cult."

Her staring black eyes were fixed on the open door. She would have spoken, for her thick lips moved, writhing convulsively. She clutched at her throat as if to tear away invisible fingers. A cry; strange, despairing. She staggered backward into the room and went tumbling weakly down upon her wretched pallet, a huddled mass of swollen, unhealthy flesh. When at last a stronger impulse answered her will and parted the blackened lips, leaping into speech, the good old doctor fairly jumped in his skin, compressing the unfortunate cat so that it began to squirm in his hold, howling disconcertingly.

"Azazel! Seducer of souls! False guide! I defy you! At this moment of passing, I render my soul not to you, but to . . . aaarrrgh!" Chokingly she ceased to speak.

The doctor stood staring down upon her, literally dying for lack of breath before his amazed eyes. It was as if someone were compressing the fat flesh of her flabby throat until the windpipe fairly collapsed upon itself. So quick was it that he could do nothing but stare, appalled.

She lay back all at once, her struggles ceasing. She became quiet; terribly quiet. A quick test told the tale. Over the sad

wreckage of what had once been a merry, innocent girl, the doctor automatically drew up the ragged quilt.

The wind whipped bare lilac branches smartly against the cracked panes of the window above the wretched pallet. Broken glass fell tinkling upon the floor. Through the lilac's denuded branches the horned moon peered slyly, morbid pallor upon its peaked countenance. Spraying wisps of spume-like cloud flickered across the sky, driven by the wind which whistled and wailed like an evil entity unleashed upon an unsuspecting world.

The old doctor extinguished the stub of candle. He went out hurriedly, carrying the scrawny black cat firmly upon one arm. He closed the door behind him almost nervously.

As he passed through the open gateway where the creaking gate hung swinging upon its broken hinges, he stood still suddenly and lifted his head in the attitude of one who strains to listen. Then he shook that white mane slowly, a puzzled and disturbed expression on his fine old face.

"Thought I heard someone laughing, and it wasn't what I'd term a pleasant laugh," he said, speaking aloud in his odd perturbation. "Well, pussy, we're both well out of it. Although," he added pityingly on second thought, "it won't be long before you eat the last meal of the condemned, if half that Hannah Wake told me is credible."

He shifted the cat into a more comfortable position and set his footsteps toward the village and his comfortable fireside, for the night wind was chill and penetrating.

His fine lips were compressed by the gravity of some secret thought. He shook his head once or twice emphatically as he strode along.

CHAPTER 3

As the doctor neared his home, his thoughts became more and more perturbed. Quint would undoubtedly resume the mask of service until such time as he could get away in safety with the puppy, and for obvious reasons that would have to be soon. As for the black cat, what on earth was to be done with the beast? If he left it around, Quint might take matters into his own hands just out of suspicion.

The old man came to a decision in his own mind. The poor beast must die. He would chloroform it immediately upon arrival at his home, and would remove the talisman. If it were what the dead woman had affirmed, he would be able to identify it by a certain—to him—simple test. Of this he could hardly dream, for it was like a fairy-tale to play with the thought that in his own hands he might actually hold the Philosopher's Stone, which had been the goal of occultists for ages.

The fact that Quint had been sent for the stone, and that he was living under the doctor's own roof, certainly complicated matters. It was a nuisance, but he would have to discharge the young man, unless Quint himself took French leave or asked permission to go, either of which might be his procedure. Meantime, Doctor Peabody did not intend that Hannah Wake's black cat should go under any other hands than his own.

The wind blew directly in his face. It fairly took his breath away. Every once in a while he had to turn his back to it, to catch his breath again. He went plunging on through the night until the lights of the village showed directly ahead. And then all at once he checked his onward rush precipitately, for the wind that tore at his mantle as if to call his attention carried on its wings a terrible scream of

agony. It was the cry of a helpless beast at bay, a beast that sees Death seizing upon it and knows it will resist in vain. After that cry, silence. The wind lulled into a momentary tranquillity as if it, too, were listening.

"What can that be?" murmured the doctor aloud, a ghastly chill striking coldly at his vitals. He stood motionless, straining his ears for a further explanatory sound, but nothing came. The night remained mysteriously aloof, holding its secret securely.

But as if that scream had told it more than the doctor could have dreamed, the black cat began to struggle wildly in his arms, its sharp and curving claws digging into his flesh, its white teeth tearing at his sleeve. The doctor found his hands full. He tried vainly to quiet it. The cat seemed possessed all at once of a strength truly demoniacal; it tore and clawed, until there was only one thing to be done. The doctor did it, sickly.

Going on toward home then, the limp furry body hidden under his cape, John Peabody swallowed hard once or twice. He disliked the thing that had been thrust upon him by the dead woman's whim. Already it had forced him to do a distasteful thing. Well, the poor beast had come to a violent death instead of the calmer one he had planned for it. The old man wondered what else would come to pass, forced into his quiet life without his own volition.

As he neared his residence he saw a light in the laboratory and was filled with indignation and anger. Quint had taken advantage of his absence, for the doctor permitted no one in the laboratory, where he kept cabinets of medical supplies (albeit under lock and key) that he would not care to have at the disposal of ignorant or malicious hands. He hastened his steps, but a thought struck him. Turning aside from the front door, he went quietly around the garden path under the laboratory windows. There he paused and looked inside, for the young man had forgotten, in his haste, to draw down the shades.

Quint stood before a table, his back to the window. He was working rapidly over something, just what the doctor could not tell positively although he surmised. A furious haste possessed the young man; as he worked, he talked to himself excitedly. Through the screened window the doctor heard his words.

"Not a sign of anything. Could she have fooled me by sleight of hand? She dared not. . . . And I saw the beast swallow it. Where can it be? Ah . . . wretched animal, did it know what fate awaited it, that it should cry so terribly even before it felt my knife? I have something now . . . it is smooth and heavy. . . ."

The young man gave an impatient push at what lay before him on the table and the mangled remains of the hound pup came into view. Quint was dipping his discovery into a pail of water. . . .

Doctor Peabody's deep anger could be restrained no longer. He lifted his right hand and rapped with his knuckles against the pane, still holding the limp body of the black cat under his mantle.

Quint whirled about and for a moment could not control his feelings, and that they did not concern his own sudden appearance the old man knew intuitively. The younger man's face was dark with passion. His lips were drawn in between his teeth, and he was making some kind of strange noise in his throat like the savage growling of a thwarted wild beast. His eyes were wide and staring, and glowed redly.

"Well, Quint?" interrogated the doctor sharply at last, breaking a silence that seemed intolerable.

Quint came to himself with a snap. He

flung to the floor the knife with which he had been pursuing his investigations, and gave his shoulders a slow shrug. The indifferent insolence of his disappointed expression startled his employer. There was evidently no need now to wear a mask; the purpose of Quint's servitude was done with.

"Get out of my laboratory," said the doctor at last, his voice thick with anger. "You know you are not allowed in there."

Quint gave a short laugh. He opened one hand under his eyes in such a way that the doctor could not see what it contained, but the hand dripped water tinged with ominous red. An expression of abstraction took possession of the young man's insolently sneering countenance. As if he could no longer contain his emotions, he cried out wildly as in despairing protest:

"Pan! Pan! Why? Why?"

And then he turned from the staring doctor, and stumbled out of the laboratory, leaving the door open behind him. His lagging feet sounded down the hall to the kitchen, through which he must pass to go upstairs to the rear of the house where his room was located.

DOCTOR PEABODY went around to the front door, which he found unlocked. He went inside, springing the lock behind him. Then he carried the limp black cat into the laboratory, taking the precaution to fasten that door behind him before he removed his outdoor garments and donned a heavy apron. To his practised hands, it was but a moment's work to locate and secure the stone he had seen the cat gulp down. He dipped it into the ruddily tinged pail of water, withdrew it, let it drip a moment, then dried it carefully with absorbent cotton.

Then he held it on his palm under the electric light . . . glowing, scintillating, gleaming . . . and his lips slowly formed the words.

"Is it the thing old Hannah claimed it to be? Let us see."

From a glass-stoppered bottle which he took from a locked cabinet he dripped with painstaking care a single drop of clear azure liquid upon the stone. There was a slight hissing sound; a flying wisp of vapor from the stone's glowing surface.

The doctor stared at the stone, his face gravely observant. The opalescent gem turned black on his upturned palm, like the polished surface of a steel mirror. Across the gleaming surface glints of light passed, that were not reflections, for they began to take shape under his eyes into definite forms. He clapped his other hand over that marching procession of tiny but distinct figures, and trembled. . . .

Then he went to the back of the room, out of sight of the window behind a screen, and sank into a comfortable if dilapidated leather-upholstered easy-chair, still with the stone between his palms. Now and again he shook his leonine mane, an incredulous look on his fine old face. But at last a sort of ague seized upon him; his pale blue eyes filled with tears, and he closed them as if to shut them against too blazing a brilliance. His fingers held tightly upon the talisman, and he pressed it against his heart, his lips moving in silent prayer.

Still he remained, for hours, as if he slept. Footsteps crept down the hallway and stopped at the laboratory door. The knob turned, ever so quietly. Then it was seen that the doctor did not sleep, for his eyes opened wide and were fixed upon the door, but he made no sound, only pushed the talisman securely into an inner vest pocket, caught up his hat and mantle, and tiptoed to the screened

window with silent haste. Infinite caution was in every movement.

The movement of the door handle ceased. The footsteps creaked down the hall. A door squeaked on its hinges.

The doctor whipped the screen from the laboratory window and swung his thin old legs across the sill. He paused for the fraction of a moment, swung them back and stepped into the room. He reached up and shut off the electric light. Then he was back at the window, and dropped onto the garden path. He stepped off it so that his feet would give no sound as he tiptoed on the grass. In cautious silence he moved away from the house toward the front gate. As he went, he thought he already heard the sound of stealthy feet on the pebbles of the path.

TEN minutes later, the doctor was walking into the service station where his car was. He knew Bill Haddon wouldn't lock up, because his German shepherd-dog Nellie was at large in the garage during the night and would have raised immediate alarm had a stranger entered.

"A faithful dog is what I should have," said the doctor to himself as he opened the door of his coupé and sank in relief onto the seat. "Atta good gal, Nellie. You knew the doctor, didn't you, Nellie?"

He settled down for the catnap that a doctor soon learns to snatch when and where he can, secure that nobody could enter the garage without Nellie's making a disturbance. As for himself, it was her way to let him in; she would not let him out until her own master came in the morning. So the good doctor slept, his cloak tightly wrapped about him.

Morning came almost too soon to a man who had enjoyed little sleep for two weeks, but the repairs to the coupé were completed within another hour and Doctor Peabody, arranging for the company of Nellie for a couple of days, drove back to his home.

His hail in the front hall brought no reply. Search of the premises disclosed no Quint, but a brief notice laid on the kitchen table.

"I am obliged to resign from your service. I am sorry I had no chance to get your recommendation but will have to get along without it." Sneering insolence, to the very end.

The doctor went into his laboratory. The door stood wide, although he had left it locked on the inside. The body of the black cat, from which his practised hand had removed the talisman with a single almost invisible cut, had been slashed this way and that.

The inference was clear. Quint had suspected the truth. Although he had apparently gone away, it would be folly to believe that he would let matters go as they were. The doctor sat down, his head in his hands.

"God, You've got to play the next trick," he prayed. "I don't know what to do."

But the following morning he knew, when a letter arrived from his old friend Job Scudder, the airship magnate.

CHAPTER 4

LEDA SCUDDER peered out between the rich lace curtains in a frozen attitude. Her charming little brunette face, expressive of the utmost amazement, held also a look of shrinking fear.

The match she had lighted with intent to ignite her monogrammed cigarette burned down unnoticed until the searing flame lapped against slender fingers, wakening her to cognizance of something besides that at which she had been gazing with such absorption.

She flung the match to the tiled solar-

ium floor and with a brief exclamation of pain and irritation turned from the window to watch the tiny flame smolder and die. Her unseeing eyes were bent then upon the smarting fingers that had been lapped by the flame, but her thoughts were obviously far from what she looked upon.

Her red-brown eyes veiled mistily with some secret thought. The look of almost stunned bewilderment and incredulity on her face was poignant; like something foreign, even painful, to her temperament.

"What's he doing here?" breathed involuntarily from Leda's scarlet lips that writhed against set teeth in a futile attempt to maintain her customary poise. "He's been in to see Uncle Job. Why?"

She tossed her cigarette-holder upon a near-by table and ran across the room.

"I've got to know why he came. It's entirely too much. I—I can't bear it!" Her voice was almost sobbing.

She knew her uncle would be in the library looking over the morning mail by himself, as was his habit before calling his secretary for dictation.

A furry ball of wiry activity and litheness launched itself through the air from a swinging portiere as the girl flashed past the doorway, arriving at a precarious seat upon one slim restless shoulder. The little beast chattered furiously until Leda put up her hand to steady that small clinging body, somewhat slackening her headlong rush. Suki grabbed at Leda's ear with both tiny paws, which had the effect of bringing his mistress to a dead stop.

"You little devil, you!" she ejaculated whole-heartedly, disentangling her ear from the small furry clutch and drawing the marmoset down into the crook of her elbow. "Down with you, Suki."

The marmoset chattered vociferously, clutching at the finger that menaced his small black muzzle.

"You are a nuisance, but I love you," whispered Leda, bending her piquant dark face until the small paws were patting at her cheeks. "Little scamp."

She swung him again to her shoulder as she paused to knock at the closed library door before entering.

Job Scudder, smoothly shaven full face bent above a mahogany desk littered with papers, lifted his gray head and removed his reading-glasses. His prominent blue eyes were startlingly alive under their scanty gray brows. Over the still handsome features a softness stole; it was like the unveiling of a deeply chiselled bas-relief . . . it revealed the soul of a man in that unguarded expression of tenderness.

"Uncle Job!"

"Leda, my dear?"

"What was *he* doing here?" cried out the girl in a low, impassioned tone.

Her manifestly disturbing emotion annoyed the marmoset, which squealed protestingly, patting his mistress's cheek rapidly with its furry paws. Leda boxed the tiny muzzle vexedly at the interruption.

Job Scudder regarded his niece with a puzzled lift of the thin gray eyebrows.

"He?" inquired the magnate. "My dear Leda, you'll have to be more explicit. More than one 'he' has been here this morning. Just which may be yours?"

Leda slipped into a great easy-chair with a quivering sigh. The tips of slender fingers were pressing against her scarlet lips in a nervous gesture of repression. She stared at her uncle searchingly.

"Possibly you mean to designate the final 'he,' Leda, who just now went out?"

She nodded, brown eyes on his smooth face.

"That chap?" said her uncle in an

amused voice. "He's Sir Hubert Wynn's valet."

"Sir Hubert's *valet?*" repeated Leda in a tragic voice that was perilously near to the high note of hysteria. "His *valet?* Wasn't that—wasn't that Sir Hubert himself?"

"Having extended a week-end invitation to Sir Hubert at the suggestion of the British vice-consul, my dear, unsight-unseen as it were, I may say that when the man tells me seriously that he is Sir Hubert's valet, I am quite likely to take his word for it," dryly.

"But—but he doesn't look like a—a valet," repeated Leda, the last word coming out like a wail.

The scarlet lips curled piteously in an obvious attempt to restrain a sob. Against her cheek the marmoset whimpered sympathetically.

"Well, perhaps a bit more than a mere valet, Leda," conceded her uncle judiciously. "He seems a mighty intelligent lad, young Henry Winch. Sort of secretary as well as valet, I gathered. Seems to manage all Sir Hubert's affairs. Smart lad," approved the magnate sententiously.

"But—Uncle Job! A servant!" wailed the girl's thin, wretched voice. "A servant!" She blinked back gathering moisture surreptitiously.

"Well educated, Henry Winch," observed old Job with an air of impartiality. "Not at all astonishing, Leda, that you took him for a gentleman, instead of a gentleman's gentleman," he finished facetiously.

Leda crouched in the refuge of the great armchair, pressing taper fingers against the betraying tremble of gay scarlet lips, her warm brown eyes somehow piteous.

Her uncle eyed her a moment, then fumbled about among the papers on his desk, produced a typed telegraph form and extended it.

"Got a mysterious communication from our old friend Doc Peabody back in Massachusetts, Leda. Just going to send for you to see what you can make of it."

LEDA extricated herself from the comforting depths of the chair with obvious reluctance. She perched herself upon the edge of her uncle's desk, shapely silken legs swinging slowly under her brief skirt. She took the telegram, but without reading it continued to regard her uncle with grave scrutiny.

"Do you mind—of course, I suppose it's none of my business, but I'd like—I mean, I'm curious to know—what was Sir Hubert's valet—here about?" she murmured incoherently, eyes avoiding Scudder's keen gaze as she spoke.

"Henry Winch? Oh, quite nothing. That is, he came to accept our invitation for this week-end at Leecroft."

"Sir Hubert's *valet* accepts our invitation?" echoed the girl sharply.

"For his employer, Leda. What's the matter? Taken a dislike to the fellow, Leda?"

"I—I hate him!" she flashed unexpectedly, then bit at her scarlet underlip until it went white between her teeth.

Her uncle regarded her curiously, and she hastened to explain her passionate outburst, with an uneasy air that she could see was not lost upon him.

"He reminds me of a—a senior I met last June at the Yale prom. We danced together. We were in the same party"—she gave a quick little intake of breath—"the same party," she continued in a low voice, "that was bumming around all that night in New Haven."

"M-m-m. Chance resemblance, eh? What was the chap's name?"

"I have reason to believe," replied Leda with a fine scorn, "that he thought it would be funny to give me another name than his own."

"College boy prank," commented Job Scudder, his air that of one who listens courteously to what is of no particular interest to him. "Have you looked over Doc's telegram? It calls for immediate answer. If you are of the same mind that I am, we'll be flying across the continent Saturday, instead of week-ending at Leecroft."

Leda bent her gaze upon the typed form.

"Mysterious, isn't he?" she commented. "Wants a formal invitation to accompany us on a western flying-trip this week-end without a hint that he's previously telegraphed. Well, it would be rather fun to go, Uncle. San Francisco? Why not write him the letter he asks for?"

"I thought you'd be intrigued, Leda. I'll send him a note by air-mail at once. This is Thursday. How about Saturday morning?"

"It'll take Gemma just a jiffy to get my things ready. Maybe it'll do her good, too; she's been positively unbearable of late," Leda frowned. "Ever since that Yale prom——" She broke off abruptly, flipped the telegram negligently onto the desk and got to her feet. "Don't forget to let Sir Hubert know that the week-end's off," she suggested pointedly.

"I'll take care of him," replied Job Scudder ambiguously, his sleek gray head bent above the telegram.

"Any other time in the very far future would do. The farther, the better," and Leda tweaked the marmoset's long furry tail playfully.

"I'll let him know that we won't be at Leecroft this week-end."

"As far as I'm concerned, I don't care if he is the interesting heir of an illustrious line, and *persona grata* with the vice-consul," snapped Leda abruptly. "I simply detest that valet of his."

"But you don't have to associate with the valet," her uncle retorted, an odd inflection dulling his voice.

"M-m-m, no. So we'll be leaving Saturday early? Anything I can do?"

"You might notify the housekeeper that we'll be gone for an indefinite time. I'll fix things so that Bartlett can look after them as usual, if you'll just tell Mrs. Mordaunt."

Leda nodded, pulled the scratching marmoset down upon her arm again, and slipped out of the library with a whirl of short green garments, shapely silken legs flashing as their owner swung gracefully out of sight.

THE airplane magnate sat back in his chair after the door had closed softly behind his charming niece. Over that wrinkled countenance there crept again the gracious softening that made it so lovable whenever the thought of his dead brother's only child passed across his mind.

"My little Leda! So like her beautiful mother." He fingered the papers on his desk, the prominent blue eyes lifting to a great oil portrait in Burling's best manner, that hung on the opposite wall in a prominent position. "The same imperious charm; the same silken brown hair and warm brown eyes. The same high spirits and reckless daring." He sighed.

"Anice, my dear," said he, addressing the portrait with tender whimsy, "I promised you long ago that I'd be father and mother to your girl, for your own sweet sake. God grant it may lie in my power to solve Leda's problem and bring peace and happiness back to her troubled heart."

Again he sighed heavily.

Then he shook his gray head slowly, pressed the electric button that would summon his secretary, and sat back, poised and coldly alert.

CHAPTER 5

EARLY morning of a crisp October day. The hazy air was full of the pungent odor of autumn bonfires and the heavy perfume of ripening grapes.

Already dressed for flight, the Scudder air-pilot was moving about the Super-flex "Queen," making a last inspection of adjustments he had ordered. Every now and then he would straighten up and throw an expectant look about the flying-field. When at last a man walked briskly down the road and crossed toward him, the pilot went over, a puzzled expression on his lean, honest countenance.

"Larry Weaver?" asked the newcomer.

Larry eyed the short, broad body of the speaker, who carried himself with the confidence born of muscular fitness, despite the characteristic forward setting of a massive head that made it seem crouched down between the heavy shoulders like a great beast lying in wait.

"That's my name," responded the pilot shortly. His alert black eyes met the other's gaze with shrewd, steady calculation.

"Sorry to be the bearer of ill news," said the newcomer, deprecatorily. "But your mechanic had rather a rotten experience last night, and I——"

"What happened?" snapped Larry sharply.

"Somebody jumped him," said the stranger. "He's in the hospital with a fractured skull. The doctor said he'd be there for quite some time."

"Quite so. And how do *you* get into the picture?" demanded Larry pointedly, his lean face tense.

"Happened to be walking this way last night, to see if I couldn't get a job around here that would take me west soon, and stumbled over the poor chap's body."

"How'd you know who he was?" the pilot drove at him.

The burly young man laughed a bit impatiently.

"Suspicious, aren't you?" he asked, almost contemptuously. "Well, I naturally got the nearest cop, and when he looked over the poor chap's pockets, he found his flying-license."

"Damn nuisance!" ejaculated Larry Weaver, his thin lips tight against clenched teeth. "The Old Man's flying west this morning, and here I am without my mechanic." His shrewd black eyes searched out the face of the other man. "You said you were looking for a job around here. Fellow, what do you know?"

The newcomer broke into a pleased smile.

"I can fly your Super-flex myself if necessary," he declared. "Been a mechanic myself, and pilot. If you'll offer me the mechanic's job on the 'Queen,' I'll jump at it. For the trip west," he amended in a bit of haste, with a momentary contraction of heavy dark brows. "I can't promise more, but you should be able to pick up a man out there."

"Uh-huh," commented the pilot, thoughtfully, scrutinizing the other man's watchful face. "License?"

It was made out in the name of Rex Quint.

"Just give me a chance at the 'Queen,' and I'll soon prove to you that I know as much as the next fellow," Rex said eagerly.

Larry Weaver's grunt was non-committal.

"Well, fellow, as the Old Man's orders are that we fly this morning by ten o'clock, and I don't know where to turn so quickly for a mechanic who'd be able to spell me off if necessary, guess I'll have to see what you know. Anybody who can vouch for you?"

The applicant showed momentary embarrassment.

"The truth is, I had a row of a sort with my last employer and thought it best to take French leave. He'd—well, he'd been acting rather oddly. But he can vouch for my being myself."

"Who was he?"

"Doctor Peabody. He used to be your boss's family doctor."

Sharp black eyes on the other, Larry Weaver asked: "Happen to know just where the doctor is now?"

Quint nodded confidently, his quiet smile showing that he understood the drift of Larry's question. "He's to go west with the Scudders this morning."

Larry jerked out quickly: "How'd you know the Old Man was going west, fellow?" Those bright black eyes bored into Quint's innocent countenance.

"The invitation was on his desk. I saw it there before I left. An invitation from Mr. Scudder.

Larry grunted. He looked the other man over, from the bushy pompadour of light brown hair to the well-shod feet.

"Well, Quint, come along. No time to lose. We'll see what you know. The passengers will be dribbling along any time now. It won't take me long to find out what you're worth to me, fellow."

He led the way back to the "Queen," and the two men were soon deeply engaged in technicalities as they examined the beautiful and graceful plane, exemplar of Job Scudder's advanced ideas in air-design, ideas that had made him one of the wealthiest men in America and one of the most important.

THE first person to appear on the flying-field arrived in a taxi surrounded by so many boxes and bundles and packages that until that great bulk heaved itself into sight one could not even guess what manner of individual hid behind the bulwark of baggage.

A loud, important voice preceded this passenger, accompanied by the tumbling of boxes and bags upon the ground as the driver leaned back and jerked open the door, grinning widely.

"Ai-ai! Help me out!" came a thick voice like suet, as the boxes began to slip and tumble in a bulky avalanche from the open taxi door. "Stir y' lazy bones, or I'll give y' a clip on the head with m' iron skillet." Subdued muttering; then, in the same suetty voice: "There go m' fresh rolls! Golly, golly!" moaned the occupant of the taxi, making no move to rescue his packages, but sitting supinely back, still hidden by the remaining bundles.

"Anybody goin' to get me rid of this overgrown coon?" shouted the taxi-driver. "Looks like he can't walk out by hisself."

"An' that's m' fresh mackerel!" wailed the unseen passenger thickly. "Oh, Venus, Venus, y' had more sense than Captain thissa time. Hellup! *Hellup!*"

At the resounding bellow that echoed and re-echoed from the walls of the hangar where the "Queen" rested, Larry Weaver emerged hurriedly, followed closely by the new mechanic, whose induction into the service of Job Scudder had evidently been consummated, for he wore a flying-suit, ill-fitting, and obviously made for a differently built man.

"What in time's the matter with Captain now?" queried the airman, as he reached the front of the hangar and took in the taxi and its open door from which bundles of all shapes and colors still erupted. "Better run across, Quint, and give our fat chef a hand. If you don't, he'll sit there until the Old Man comes, he's that lazy."

Larry returned to the hangar. The new assistant walked leisurely across the field to the taxi, the occupant of which was still emitting occasional outcries.

"Why don't you help him?" demanded Quint arrogantly of the driver.

The man looked once, looked twice, at those broad shoulders and muscular arms, gulped, then with an uneasily casual air slipped lower behind the wheel.

"Lookahere, mister, it ain't none of my business to lug bundles for no fat coon," he defended himself growlingly, but with his eyes on Quint's burly form.

"That so? Well, make it your business now," ordered Quint briefly with the authoritative air of the man accustomed to obedience.

Without any further attention to the taxi-driver, he turned to the bundles that still obstructed the taxi door, and began pulling them out into a pile on the ground. The taxi-man hesitated, dubious eyes on Quint, then slipped reluctantly out of his seat and began picking up boxes.

"Take them over to the hangar," directed Quint indifferently, and continued unpacking the occupant of the car.

"Ai-ai!" gasped the throaty voice heavily. "Ai-ai! Here, take m' fresh roas' beef, man." Incredibly fat black fingers stuck up over the barricade of bundles and dropped the designated article into Quint's extended hand. "I'm comin', man. I'm comin'."

And with that, the remaining packages heaved and billowed, and from the parting that resulted there emerged an enormously fleshy black man, shiny with the perspiration of his prodigious efforts. His lugubrious countenance puffed away like a quilted coverlet from his small eyes and tiny flat nose; even his thick lips appeared tucked down like a rotund button in the midst of that glossy black flesh. The white eyeballs rolled left, rolled right, and lighted on Quint with pompous curiosity.

"They's m' fresh greens in that basket," he elucidated in his suetty voice, curiosity fixing his small eyes on Quint. The breath came puffing wheezily through his small flat nose as he tried to recover from the winded condition due to his many wild bellows for assistance. "Man, who's you?"

"New mechanic, boy," retorted Quint, motioning the disgruntled taxi-driver to pull out the remaining bundles and carry them to the "Queen."

"Don't y' sass me thataway!" warned the black Colossus, as he managed to roll himself from the taxi until he was standing on the grass on a pair of such tiny feet that Quint could not for the life of him restrain a look of amazement.

Captain followed that gaze complacently. A vain smile of extreme satisfaction drew up the button mouth until the fat cheeks puffed enormously. He smoothed his white linen suit over his corpulent body with a deprecatory air.

"Pretty nice foots, huh, Mr. Mechanic?" chortled the fat chef, looking cheerful for the first time since his appearance upon the scene. "These here foots, Mr. Mechanic, they're littler than my Venus's foots."

Quint turned away, grinning in spite of himself.

Captain waddled across the field toward the "Queen", leaving Quint to settle with the taxi-man, and without burdening himself with any of his bundles.

"You'd better take 'em in, Quint," Larry suggested, later. "Captain'd never be able to lean down and pick 'em up. Fat moron," the pilot commented. "But he can cook, *and* how."

"What marvelous pedal extremities!" the new assistant murmured in Larry's ear.

Larry chuckled.

"Captain's very fond of his feet. Proud of 'em, too. If ever he gets good and mad at you, fellow, just tell him what wonderful 'foots' he has, and he'll get over his mad like a flash."

"Thanks for the tip," smiled the new mechanic.

QUINT was still busily engaged in stowing the packages in the immaculate kitchenette of the "Queen" when an agreeable masculine voice addressed him. He straightened up, regarding the inquirer with veiled interest.

"I'm Sir Hubert Wynn's secretary," explained the new man. "My name's Winch, Henry Winch. Any place inside where I can put the dog?"

Larry Weaver interposed. He had followed Henry Winch into the kitchenette, his eyes on the shaggy Airedale which the newcomer held on a leash. The dog turned at sound of a new voice and emitted a soft, deep-down growl, although its tail wagged briskly.

"You're traveling with Mr. Scudder, then?" Larry asked, stepping back a pace at the dog's warning. "I don't think he'll want the dog in the drawing-room, Mr. Winch."

"Very good dog," hastily explained the secretary. "He won't bite. Whiskers, behave yourself!"

The Airedale reared itself against the speaker, both clumsy forepaws on Henry Winch's breast, rough brown face uplifted, eyes beseeching.

"It's Sir Hubert's dog," said the secretary, his fingers rumpling the dog's thick, curly hair. "He'll have to go aboard."

Larry uttered what could only be termed a guffaw.

"Well, the servants' sitting-room might serve," he suggested.

"I'll tie him in there, while I get Sir Hubert's luggage from the taxi, then."

Quint shot an interrogative look at his superior.

"I'll give you a hand, Winch," said he.

"Mister Winch," murmured Larry pointedly, and observed how his assistant's nose twitched at the rebuke.

Henry Winch followed Larry into the sitting-room designated, and tied the dog to a table-leg. As the two men went out for the luggage, a lugubrious strain issued dolefully from Captain's kitchenette. A grin overspread Larry's face as he stopped for a moment to listen, and the grin was emulated by a wide smile from Henry Winch. Irreligiously, Captain was intoning that nobody knew the troubles he'd had, nobody knew but *Veee*nus.

"That's his heavy sweetie," observed Larry, meeting Henry's amused gray eyes. "She's as little and as skinny as he's big and fat, and he's really devoted to her."

"Must look absurd together," Henry Winch said, as the two men stepped out of the Super-flex.

"Poor things!" Larry's lean, long face registered whimsical commiseration. "People turn around and laugh at them when they go out together on the street. And the poor idiots go home and cry over it."

The secretary shook his head in amused sympathy.

"Had I better wait until Miss Scudder's maid arrives, to find out where Sir Hubert's luggage is to go?"

"Oh, take everything into the sitting-room."

Larry disappeared in the rear of the hangar.

Henry Winch walked toward the taxi, meeting Quint on the way; the mechanic had picked up a stupendously heavy armful of valises, canes, umbrellas and odd bundles of all sizes and shapes.

"Sitting-room, the pilot said," called the secretary as he went on to get the rest of the luggage.

A LIMOUSINE whirled in off the road and sped across the grass toward the hangar. The secretary whirled to look after it, an odd expression straining his handsome young face. He pulled nervously at one clipped mustache.

The shining automobile drew up be-

fore the hangar and a footman sprang down to open the door deferentially. A white-haired man emerged, followed by a slender girl whom he assisted tenderly. Followed another elderly man, enveloped in a black cloak. The three walked under the hangar, and the secretary's eyes were upon them until they disappeared into the airship.

Behind the limousine a station car glided in. The footman went back to this machine and with mock deference assisted a plump dark-haired girl to the ground. Her arms were full of flowers and she gestured toward the interior of the car. The footman began pulling suitcases and bags out.

A taxi had whirled up beside the station car, and as the girl turned toward the hangar, she barely avoided a collision with the impeccably dressed monocled young man who emerged from the last vehicle. The secretary, already approaching the hangar, overheard with inward astonishment and curiosity the exclamations of both girl and man.

"Santa Vergine!" cried out the girl, reeling backward, her black eyes blazing upon the carefully garbed gentleman before her, who fumbled stupidly with the monocle that had jerked out of his eye as he avoided the threatened collision.

The secretary's forehead corrugated with perplexity as the newcomer exclaimed in gasping stupefaction: "You!"

And then both girl and man cried together: "What are you doing here?"

The tone of the girl's voice was that of frozen fire, terrible with intensity and restraint. The man's expressed stupid dismay. He was first to recover poise, however; screwed his monocle into position and eyed hardly the girl who palpitated before him, her red lips writhing with the urge for speech that refused to formulate itself from the very profundity of her emotions.

"So *you* are Sir Hubert?" asserted, rather than asked, the girl. "Now I understand everything. Oh, you coward!" Her tone was bitter. Scorn and hatred seethed in her fiery words. *"Bestia animale!* Oh, you shall pay! Gemma Panelli swears it! You shall suffer!"

She whirled away and almost ran toward the hangar, Sir Hubert behind her uttering wild expostulations.

"But you are mistaken. It isn't the way you think. Only have patience, Gemma! Oh, hang it all!"

She turned upon him furiously.

"Don't dare speak to me again," she flung at him fiercely. "Pig!"

With a gesture of disgust and anger she disappeared into the airship, leaving Sir Hubert talking to empty air.

"This way, Sir Hubert," observed the secretary then, in an oddly ironical tone, as he led the way toward the "Queen."

Sir Hubert was still gasping like a goldfish out of water.

"Sorry to see you almost had a collision with that fiery little girl," Henry Winch went on, conversationally bent. "You seem to have met her before. Am I correct in my surmise?"

Sir Hubert choked, swallowed, turned dark red.

"No. That is——" he began in a tone of apology that sat queerly on him.

"Oh, well, not that it matters," responded the secretary politely, and showed his employer the passage to the drawing-room.

As Henry Winch entered the sitting-room, a loud wail sounded from the kitchenette. Captain, his round fat face shaking jelly-like, his small eyes protruding glassily, emerged.

"M' rabbit's foot!" mourned the fat chef in a rising tremolo. "M' rabbit's foot! Something bad am sure goin' to happen. Lost m' rabbit's foot! Ai, ai, Venus, y'll never see y' Captain again!"

CHAPTER 6

TOWARD evening of that October flight, Leda, observing that Sir Hubert's attention was wholly absorbed in a magazine and that her uncle and the doctor were off in a corner by themselves, conversing in a low tone, walked negligently down the passage and into the sitting-room where she knew she would find Gemma. It was not that Leda wished to see Gemma. In fact, when she looked into the room, she beckoned the maid with imperative finger to come outside.

"How do you and Sir Hubert's valet get along together, Gemma?" she asked, lips curling scornfully.

The Italian girl's mouth drew into a quick smile.

"He isn't a valet," she whispered back. "He's a gentleman, Miss Leda; that's what he is."

"Indeed? Fallen upon evil days, I presume," Leda murmured derisively. "Does he drink, perhaps?"

Gemma shook her black head.

"Oh, no," she whispered positively. "No, he's really very nice, Miss Leda."

Gemma did not add that Henry Winch treated her with the utmost courtesy without once lessening a gulf which she instinctively felt between herself and the handsome young secretary.

Leda shrugged impatient shoulders.

"He reminds me of someone I met at Yale. I—I think they may be related. I—I want to talk with him alone, Gemma."

The maid's heavy black brows rose in astonishment, but she knew perfectly what was expected of her.

"I was just going to my cabin to unpack," she murmured, and went out reluctantly, with a backward glance at the secretary's wavy dark hair. If she were looking for a look from him, she was disappointed, for he did not lift his face from the book he was reading.

The Airedale, however, began to jump impatiently, pulling at his leash which Henry Winch had fastened to the leg of the table. Suki leaped from Leda's shoulder to the dog's furry back, with a chattering scream of excitement. Whiskers started to bark loudly, baring his teeth impotently at this mischievous wight that evaded his snapping jaws but maintained its seat upon his back.

"Don't let that ugly dog hurt Suki!" cried Leda sharply, running to rescue her tiny pet.

The rescue was effected with difficulty, for the dog leaped and bounded, seemingly in all directions at once, uttering loud barks at each jump.

"Suki was to blame," observed the secretary coldly, lifting his eyes from the book, which he closed with one finger marking the place as if he expected his visitor to depart momentarily.

Leda colored angrily as she saw this. She regarded the young man with cold fury, holding the squirming marmoset gently against her slight body.

"It is always somebody else who is to blame . . . with *you*," said she in a low, guarded voice that carried a bitter undertone.

"No. You're wrong," rebuked the secretary unexpectedly. He put out one hand to quiet the bounding, barking dog. "Hush, Whisk! Miss Scudder, nobody knows better than I who is most to blame. It is only myself," he emphasized with a pointedness that held a deeper significance than the slight encounter called for.

The collected, earnest gaze of Henry Winch met Leda's puzzled eyes without flinching.

"You actually admit that you are to blame?" demanded the girl. "You are

at least honest . . . about your culpability. But—but you were not entirely at fault," she added hastily, also with a significance entirely out of proportion to what seemed the occasion, for she did not look at the uneasy dog nor did she caress the little monkey on her shoulder.

"Do you . . . are you assuming——?" began Henry Winch hastily, only to be interrupted by Leda Scudder's suddenly cold and distant voice.

"Please do not misunderstand me. If one makes a fool of oneself, at least one may be honest enough to admit it. That does not mean anything, after all, does it? One does not care to be reminded constantly of it, though. What I wish to know is: What did you come here for? The least you could have done was to have remained away, out of my sight," she flung at him intensely, one foot tapping the rug nervously. "You should know by this time that I—that I hoped never to look at your face again while I lived."

"Oh!" uttered the secretary, but softly, yet with an agony of emotion expressed in the monosyllable. "Oh, you can be cruel! As cruel as you are alluring and beautiful!"

"How dare you?" the girl snapped.

"How dare I?" murmured the secretary sadly, his head drooping as he ran his hand over Whisker's rough hide. "I dare nothing, but the thought that you consider me——"

"My opinion of you does not matter. What does matter is that when we reach Los Angeles I expect you to leave this ship and never again come where I shall lay eyes on your face. You have been nothing but——" Leda stopped abruptly, her white teeth catching at her red lip.

The young man regarded her gravely.

"I see you have not forgiven me," he said slowly. "I am sorry. I had hoped——"

"There is no use hoping," retorted the girl hardly. "I hate and despise you, and you know why. I can not be intentionally rude to Sir Hubert in order to get rid of his secretary," she continued ironically, "but there are limits to my endurance. I came now to tell you that if you continue to follow me around, I shall—I shall——" she caught her skirt in one hand and tore at it so savagely that the soft satin went shapeless under her fingers.

"Besides," she continued rapidly, still in a low, guarded voice, "I could never forgive you for your deception. You lied to me once. How am I to know what other lies you have in readiness, you—you servant!"

The pointed scorn in her tone must have stung Henry Winch beyond endurance. He sprang toward her from the place where he had risen at her entry, and the book fell out of his hand to the floor, startling the Airedale into loud barks again.

"Stop it, Whiskers! Miss Scudder, no matter how cowardly, no matter how much of a fool I may have been in the past, I have never lied to you or deceived you. That is——" he suddenly fumbled his words, his pale face going dark red.

The girl regarded him with lofty scorn.

"I must have been blind," she said softly, at which he once more whitened.

"As I may have been, also," retorted the secretary quickly, and at the flash of hot anger in her eyes his lips tightened.

"We were both——"

JOB SCUDDER appeared in the doorway, pausing as if uncertain whether he had interrupted or not. He held his spectacles in one hand and in the other held out to Leda a telegram blank.

"My dear, you remember this telegram?"

Leda recovered her equanimity with an

effort, and took the yellow blank. A glance at it, and then she nodded.

"Of course. Doctor's telegram."

"And he declares he knows nothing about it," declared her uncle impressively. "Now, who do you suppose sent it?"

The girl looked puzzled. Over her bowed head old Job shot a strange look at the young man standing there with an expression of deep wretchedness on his fine face.

"The—er—the dog didn't do any harm, did he, Winch?" asked Job Scudder.

"No harm," responded Henry Winch slowly.

Between the old man and the young an exchange of glances took place. This escaped Leda, who had already turned from them, and with the telegram in her slender fingers went out into the corridor. As she went out, the look between the two men became intimate.

"Anything happened?" asked Job Scudder sharply, in an undertone, and with an apprehensive glance toward the corridor.

"She wanted to know why I was following her. And I'm to give up my position immediately upon our arrival at Los Angeles," he finished, ironically. "Gad, how she hates me!" and groaned.

Job Scudder shook his gray head sympathetically.

"She'll come around," he counselled. "Patience, my boy."

Henry Winch laughed shortly and bitterly.

"Something I'm particularly short on," he murmured, as Job went out of the room. "Patience!"

"Somebody knew that I wanted to get to California," Doctor Peabody was saying, as he pushed his spectacles up nervously to look at Leda. "Now, who could it have been?"

"Someone who wanted to get you there quickly. But why?"

"Leda, my dear, there is only one living person who might have suspected my need," the doctor mused. "That is the fellow who was my man-of-all-work, a husky chap who turned out to have been playing a curious part——"

He fell into thoughtful silence, while Leda regarded him abstractedly. All at once he struck the palm of one hand with his doubled fist.

"I have it! Job! Job Scudder!" he cried to the airplane magnate who was entering the salon. "Who besides your pilot knows where we're going?"

"Now whatever's gotten into you, John? My butler, my housekeeper, my . . . what would it matter?"

"Much," responded the old physician tersely. He gave a quick look about, observed that Sir Hubert had retired to his cabin and that Leda was now occupied with tuning in the radio at the other end of the drawing-room. "Job, there's the devil to pay, if I'm not mistaken. I mean it, when I say 'the devil'."

"What on earth is this nonsense?" laughed Scudder, briskly tucking his reading-glasses into their case and the case into a vest pocket.

"I tell you, Job, somebody—and I've a notion of who it is, too—sent that telegram to you so that I'd go west the way he'd planned, and——"

He stopped, put one hand to his forehead with a fumbling gesture, then touched his coat over his heart nervously, giving a sigh of relief as he did so.

"The truth is, Job, I've had a weird experience with Hannah Wake. Remember her?"

"That old hag everybody called a witch? Rather. A fearsome creature at her best, John. What of her?"

"She sent for me about a week ago, and before dying delivered into my keep-

ing a talisman which I was to carry to the head of the Circle of Light in California."

"Well?" smiled Job.

"My handy man, a robust husky who'd been with me for a few months only, turned up in her shack that night. He didn't know she'd sent for me so that I'd arrived beforehand and was hidden there. It seems he'd been deputed to get that talisman, and the old woman had already turned it over to me as an act of contrition on her deathbed."

"What are you trying to tell me, John? This sounds absurd."

"I'm telling you that old Hannah possessed a queer stone with a strange inscription on it; a stone that shines of itself in the dark," replied the old doctor. "I've given it a test. Personally, I'm persuaded that it is what the old alchemists termed the Philosopher's Stone."

"So this stone is supposed to have supernatural qualities?" dryly asked the airplane magnate. "Really, John, I'd have expected more judgment from you than to have let that old witch impose on you."

"Witch?" repeated the physician. "You've hit the nail on the head. She *was* a witch if ever witches existed. I do believe that she had other than everyday powers at her disposal. And there's something uncanny about that stone. That's why I'm disposed to credit her story. She certainly managed to fool Quint neatly by feeding the stone in a piece of meat to her cat, so that I could get it away without any suspicion on his part. She palmed off a substitute on him to give me time. But he discovered it that same night, which precipitated matters."

Job Scudder's brow gathered thoughtfully.

"That's odd. That's deucedly odd. John, we had to take on a strange mechanic just before leaving Long Island, and his name is——"

"Not Quint!" cried out the doctor. His pale blue eyes stared at his friend in consternation. "Job, I believe it was Quint who sent that telegram in my name. Why? He wanted me to go by this airship, the very one he's managed to go by, also. He's aiming to get the talisman from me."

"Then there must be something in Hannah's claims after all," Job Scudder admitted unwillingly.

The thrilling manner in which the airplane flight was interrupted and the weird adventure that befell the party will be described in next month's chapters

THE MIND-MASTER

BY-EDMOND-HAMILTON

"He staggered with it like an automaton toward the thirteenth cabinet."

NIGHT was falling when I came at last in my panting little car to the flat summit of the mountain that for two days had been my goal. For two days had I pressed along the rough backroads and through the sleepy villages of the central Pennsylvanian mountains, and only that morning I had glimpsed from afar the looming, truncated bulk of the mountain I sought, clad in pine and hemlock, dark and grim and forbidding.

Through all that afternoon I had pressed up its side, following the rude and narrow road that twisted toward the summit, and now when I came at last to that summit night was darkening about me, and all that could be seen was the rutty road beneath the fan of light from my head lamps, and the white stars that diamonded the black vault above and about me, and the far twinkling light of some lonely farmhouse miles beneath and behind me.

Silent trees reared all about me, and through them the road led toward the summit's center. It was but moments before I reached it, passing out between the last of the gaunt trees into a central clearing. In this clearing I could make out a low white structure whose two windows glowed with yellow light. Nearer, it showed as a concrete building some sixty feet in length, of one story throughout except for a cylindrical room or tower that lifted a little higher at the rear. I glimpsed vaguely beyond the building the gleam of soaring steel masts.

Switching off my car's motor, I moved with my leather bag toward the door whose dark, square outline I could make out in the white wall before me. Suddenly that door was flung open, releasing a

flood of yellow light upon me. In its opening stood darkly framed the figure of a man, a tall, big-shouldered and tawny-haired man of over middle age, with strong keen face and quick eyes gazing intently. Then he was striding down toward me, slipping into his pocket the metal tube his right hand had held, and stretching forth that hand to grasp my own.

"Darley!" he exclaimed. "You've got here—I was afraid you'd missed your way!"

"No thanks to you, Dain, that I did get here," I told him smilingly as I returned the handclasp. "You didn't say in your letter that the mountain you lived on was the highest and hardest to find in the country."

"You got my letter, then," he said. "I wrote you, Darley, as soon as I heard that you'd returned from your African work; I wanted to have you here, and no one at the Foundation knows where I'm working. You didn't tell any of them?" he added anxiously.

I shook my head. "No, I didn't broadcast the location of your hermitage, Dain, though I can't understand why you'd leave the Foundation laboratories for this God-forsaken spot."

While I spoke, Dain, grasping my bag, propelled me through the door into the building's yellow-lit interior, and for the moment I was silent as I gazed around it. The room was a long one with low ceiling and white walls, furnished with a few oak chairs and tables, the dust upon which gave an accurate index to the quality of Dain's housekeeping.

Shelves lined the walls from floor to ceiling on two sides, stacked deep with books in rows, in scores, in hundreds. Thick volumes of the proceedings of learned societies were there, ponderous German and English and Italian technical works, masses of slim, paper-bound scientific monographs. Chemistry, physics, biology—my own science of bacteriology, even—all were represented in the collection of volumes that filled the shelves and overflowed in masses onto the tables.

"Your library's rather comprehensive for a biologist," I told Dain, and he nodded.

"It is, Darley, but the fact is that in the work I'm doing here I'm dipping into a half-dozen sciences."

"You must have rather extensive laboratories, then," I said.

"Come and see them for yourself," he invited, opening a door in the living-room's rear wall.

Beyond it was a corridor running parallel with the long living-room, and Dain turned to the right along this and led me into the first room opening from it.

"My biological lab," he explained.

I nodded, my eyes taking in the white-tiled room's interior, the great retorts resting on heating-plates, the dissection-frames, microscopic equipment.

"Really very complete," I approved. "How on earth do you get current for heat and light here, Dain?"

"Easily," he smiled. "When I had this place built two years ago I had two big steel windmill masts erected, and since the wind's always strong up here I can rely on my windmill-dynamo hook-up for light and heat and power."

We had passed out into the corridor again, and the next door he opened proved that of a small physical laboratory, in which was very complete equipment for radio-active and Roentgen-ray work. Another large room held full equipment for chemical investigations, organic and inorganic, and in still another I was astonished to find a well-planned bacteriological outfit with all necessary centrifuges and microscopes and dye apparatus. But Dain only smiled at my questions.

BEYOND the four laboratories the corridor turned toward the building's rear, ending in a curving section of wall and a high closed door. I saw by the curve of the wall that the cylindrical tower I had noted from outside lay there, but when I took a step toward it Dain took my arm and turned me back along the corridor, away from it.

"That room's not for inspection yet, Darley," he said, half laughing. "It will serve to whet your curiosity for a while."

"My curiosity has had sharpening enough," I grinned as we moved back into the living-room. "What in the devil are you doing here, Dain? And why do it here instead of at the Foundation?"

He did not answer until we had settled in opposite chairs with our pipes going. "They didn't tell you anything at the Foundation, then, of how I came to leave them?"

I shook my head. "Not much. I gathered that there had been some kind of a row over some experiments of yours, and that you'd walked out and hadn't been seen by them since. But what was it all about?"

"I'd rather not tell you just yet, Darley," he said slowly, "for it would tell you what I'm doing here, and I'm going to keep you in curiosity as to that for a day or so. The crux of the matter was, however, that when on the point of carrying out one of the most important biological experiments ever planned, those sentimentalists at the Foundation had a spasm of horror and kicked up a row."

I considered that. "Well, but Dain," I said reluctantly, "you must admit that some of the experiments you did before, even, were rather horrible in a way."

"You're thinking of the monsters I made by grafting new limbs on familiar animals?" he said, with sardonic amusement.

"That," I admitted, "and others. Those dwarf and giant animals you turned out by controlling their gland activity. And that thing you were working on when I left, trying to dissolve away animal bodies with gases and keep their heads living artificially without bodies at all."

He blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "Well, some of those things may have been rather weird, Darley. But they were all child's play compared to what I'm doing here."

"And that——?"

Dain laughed. "No, Darley, I told you I was going to tease your curiosity for a day or two. Besides, I'm not quite finished."

"Is your tremendous secret in that round tower at the back?" I asked, remembering the room which he had not shown me.

He nodded. "That's Bluebeard's chamber. And it holds a work that is going to affect the world, all life in the world, profoundly. A work of whose importance you can not dream!"

His words were almost solemn, but abruptly his mood changed. "But enough of biology tonight — I've been living alone with it for two years, remember. Tell me about the Foundation crowd, Braumer, Hankins, Mitchell and the rest —I haven't seen any of them since I came here."

"Braumer and Mitchell?" I said. "Then you hadn't heard of their disappearance?"

"Disappearance?" he repeated, and I nodded.

"Yes, both of them dropped out of sight not six months after you did, Dain, the best chemist and radiologist at the Foundation. Nor have they been the only ones, at that. Jorgenson, America University's star physicist, Barrois, the Montreal electrical wizard, Mendana, the Mexican aviation inventor, Morson, psychologist—

a dozen scientists of the first rank disappeared in the last year or so."

"Incredible," said Dain. "And no trace of any of them?"

"No trace whatever. They just seemed to walk out of existence, as far as anyone knows."

He shook his head. "Incredible," he repeated. "But perhaps each of them has found some mountain hermitage as I did, Darley. And perhaps each is wondering tonight," he added smilingly, "what the polite way is of telling their guest that they're sleepy and want to go to bed."

Laughing, I rose with him, stretching in a drowsiness born of my long day's drive over the rough mountain roads. Dain grasped my bag and led the way into the corridor behind the living-room, but instead of turning right to the laboratories he turned left, where I found a little along the corridor two small bedrooms that faced each other from opposite sides. In one of these he deposited my bag and with a final good-night left me.

Gazing around, I found that the bedroom's small windows gave a view of part of the clearing around the building, bordered by the looming pines. Save for these and the white stars overhead nothing was to be seen, and there was no sound but the whisper of the night breeze. When, a little later, I stretched myself in bed in the darkened room, that whisper came through my windows and caressed my ears with its delicate repetition of sound until I sank into a dreamless sleep.

All was still dark about me when I awoke from that sleep, but I knew — sensed that it was but a few hours later. Puzzled as to what had awakened me, though I have been always a very light sleeper, I sat for some moments erect. Then there came again the sound that had, I knew, aroused me, a faint murmuring from somewhere at the building's rear.

With a sudden impulse I slipped from bed, into my slippers, and moved softly across the room to the door. Opening it, I noticed at once that no light showed beneath Dain's door, but it was not that that held me silent at the moment but the murmuring sound rising for a moment to a louder pitch. That murmur was of muffled voices!

Amazed I listened, standing silent in the dark corridor, and a quick half-fear tempered my amazement as I heard those voices murmuring in the sleeping building on the sleeping mountain's top, where only Dain and I were. I half turned back toward my room, then suddenly turned again and moved silently down the dark corridor, toward the laboratories.

The murmuring grew a little louder in my ears, and when I came to the turn that led to the tower room at the rear I knew instantly that it was from there the sound came. More slowly I stepped toward that room's high closed door, and had raised my hand to knock against it when the voices inside were speaking again, and this time coming, though muffled, clearly enough for understanding.

"——could not talk with you before, but now I want a report of your progress. Braumer, have you worked out that formula for the new bromidic gas yet?"

It was Dain's voice that I was hearing, curt and cold, and I listened in utter amazement as he spoke that name. *Braumer?* But now another muffled voice was answering him.

"It can, I think, be with some trouble done," it answered, and I gasped as I recognized the characteristic German turn of speech of Braumer, my own former associate at the Foundation. "A question it chiefly is of placing the bromidic gas in form to be swiftly released, and that could

be accomplished by molecular compression."

"Work it out then, Braumer, and soon," said Dain. "And you, Mitchell, have you devised any way of utilizing the N-rays? No matter how destructive they are to flesh, they'll be useless if we can't project them for a distance."

Another voice answered rapidly. "I haven't succeeded yet, Dain, but I think I can devise a projector for them if you'll give me time enough. You know how hard it is to work under these conditions —here with no——"

"No excuses, Mitchell," Dain's voice cut in coldly. "You've had time enough already. And you, Barrois?"

Like one in a dream I stood at the closed door, listening, while the muffled voice of Barrois inside outlined a method of projecting electrical flashes of terrific voltage through the air to electrocute any group of men, five or five hundred. Then Grant and Hall and Langham, the three California chemists whose disappearance a year before had puzzled the world, reported their ideas on a continuing explosive, shells or bombs of which would in first bursting scatter smaller shells to a great distance on all sides, to spread annihilation over immense areas.

Sarkoff and Krotin, the Russians whose vanishing months before had startled all physicists, gave in their accented English details of a method of molecular dispersion that if successful would make all matter in the zone of a certain force self-exploding. Yokuni, the Japanese toxicologist, coolly outlined in his hissing voice the methods of production of poisons so deadly and facile to spread that vials dropped here and there in lake or stream would make a nation's waters rivers of death.

Then the heavy voice of Jorgenson, advising on the erection of a radio broadcasting station of world-wide scope. Mendana, the brilliant Mexican aeronautic inventor, gave further suggestions on the manless, radio-controlled airplanes that had made his name famous before his disappearance. And the twelfth and last, Morson, the world-famed missing psychologist, reported in answer to Dain's question that he was working out a detailed plan that was almost finished.

Then Dain's voice again. "That's enough for tonight," he said, "but I want to hear tomorrow night what progress you make. I daren't talk with you again until then."

There was a series of sharp clicks inside, and then as I crouched there in silence with brain whirling I heard footsteps inside approaching the door at which I listened. I turned, raced back down the corridor, and as I passed around its angle heard the door opening and Dain emerging behind me.

The faint clash of bolts told me he was locking the big door, and by the time he came down the corridor I was in my room with its door closed. He halted for a moment outside my door, as though listening, and then as though satisfied moved into his own room. Then was silence, and I sat in my bed with my mind spinning in a confused maelstrom.

WHAT place of mystery had I entered in this quiet and lonely mountain-top laboratory of Dain's? Braumer—Mitchell—I had heard them and all the others of those twelve star scientists whose vanishings had for months puzzled all the world. They had not, then, after all, been the victims of foul play as the world had thought, but had chosen to come secretly to this lonely mountain top where Dain himself had come first of all to set up these laboratories.

But *why* had they done so? Why had Dain and then the others left their work to bury themselves here? The different

physical and chemical laboratories I had seen showed beyond doubt that these twelve scientists were carrying out with Dain some work of immense importance here, but what could that work be? What work could need the things I had heard them reporting, the destructive gases of Braumer, the withering rays of Mitchell, the explosives of the Californians and the manless airplanes of Mendana and the poisons of Yokuni, and the others?

Why, too, had Mitchell and Braumer and the rest concealed themselves from me in that tower room during my visit to Dain? Were they all afraid that I would betray their presence here to the world? But if that were so, why had Dain invited me at all? And with that question, for the first time, there shot across my mind, thin and sinister as a flare of far-off lightning, the first thought of danger that had come to me. Why *had* I been invited here? Why had Dain, in his letter, stressed so his wish that I tell none of where I was going or where he was located?

Until the gray light of morning crept through the windows beside me I sat there with my mind a whirl of opposing suggestions and suspicions. Collecting my thoughts when I heard Dain rising in the opposite room, I decided to give him no thought of my knowledge of the presence of Mitchell and Braumer and the others in the building, but to await events in the hope of stumbling upon whatever secret Dain and they were guarding here. It might be, after all, that explanation was simple enough, and so I rose and was completing dressing when Dain looked in a few minutes later.

Calm and undisturbed as ever, apparently, his greeting was friendly enough, and it was on commonplace subjects that he and I talked as we prepared and ate our breakfast in the compact little kitchen and diner that opened from the living-room's end. From the building's rear, where lay the tower, there came no sound whatever, but the very silence made me nervous, knowing as I did of those concealed there. Dain, however, conversed as ordinarily, asking me in a pause in the talk how I had slept.

"Well enough," I said, my eyes upon him, "except that I was half awakened once—thought I heard voices. Perhaps I had only been talking in my sleep, though."

"You must have been, Darley," said Dain, smiling. "You and I are the only men on the mountain."

Almost Dain's cool answer persuaded me that I had dreamed my experience of the preceding night, but when we had risen from breakfast and had cleared up the little kitchen his words revived my doubts.

"I'm for my laboratories, Darley," he said as we paused. "I'd like to show you what I'm doing in them and in the tower, but as I said last night I'm not just finished. You don't mind waiting a day or two?"

"Get along to your toil, Dain," I told him. "This is a vacation for me, man, and I don't want even to see a laboratory."

"Glad you don't mind," he said, looking somewhat relieved. "You can amuse yourself with the books here—you'll find those Surallo monographs on the tse-tse as a carrier in your line, I think, and that book of Zeitner's on the bubonic microbe—and you can look around the place. Poke into anything you like."

"Except Bluebeard's chamber," I said, and he smiled.

"Exactly," he said, and with a final expressive wave of his hand toward the books turned into the corridor. A moment later came the clash of locks opening as he entered the tower room.

For a time I was silent, listening, but there came no sound other than the clink

of glass and metal, and once the humming of powerful generators or motors somewhere in the building's basement. So, turning my attention to the books of which Dain had spoken, I began an examination of them. I found that among their several thousand volumes were represented almost every branch of science, and as I glanced over the titles I felt a certain astonishment.

For the books, arranged in orderly sections despite their apparent disorder, dealt almost exclusively with the destructive powers of the sciences of which they treated. In chemistry they were concerned wholly with deadly gases and explosives, in physics with various destructive rays and forces, in electricity with the powers of blasting discharges and currents, in biology with the extirpation of life rather than with its renewal, in my own science of bacteriology with all the methods of propagating virulent bacteria but with none of the methods of destroying them. It was as though the destructive possibilities of every branch of science had been gathered together. What connection had the fact with what I had heard during the night?

Through all the day it was that question that loomed largest in my mind while I loitered with ostensible carelessness about the building. Dain did not appear until noon, seeming abstracted and occupied when we lunched together, though making an effort to converse with me. During the afternoon he stayed in the laboratories and tower room wholly, but I did not again hear the voices of the twelve concealed there.

I did hear the occasional hum of motors, and found that as Dain had said these were supplied with currents by the towering steel windmill masts behind the building, which I had glimpsed in the darkness on my arrival. Rod-connections ran down from them to dynamos in a small concrete building beneath, from which heavy connections ran to the main building. I noted from the building's rear that in the cylindrical tower room were no windows, and that the basement seemed also windowless and without any door that I could find.

WHEN I strolled again into the building at the afternoon's end, Dain was just emerging from his laboratories, inquiring as to how I had spent the day. When we had supped and sat outside the building in the warm summer air, watching the red sun sink behind the great trees that ringed the clearing, our conversation was but desultory, and continued so after we had returned with darkness to the living-room.

I managed to bring Dain around to the subject of the vanished scientists, but he professed himself as much in the dark as I on that subject. It was obvious to me that he was somewhat tense-nerved as whatever work occupying him came to its conclusion, and under the circumstances the conversation was a strain to me also. I was glad enough when he rose yawning and announced his intention of retiring.

When I had closed my own room's door upon his good-night, I undressed and retired with as much noise as possible. There was silence then for a time, while I lay motionless with every nerve thrilling. For I had resolved that if Dain went again to the tower room that night I would follow and endeavor to overhear the secret of the mystery that was apparently centered here.

At last, after more than an hour of silence, I heard Dain's door softly open and his steps as he approached my own door and listened. I breathed deeply and regularly, like a sleeper, and in a moment heard him moving on down the corridor.

Instantly I was out of bed, donning slippers and pausing to fish from my bag

the stubby automatic I had brought for my drive over the lonely mountain roads. As I moved silently out into the corridor, I heard the clash of the tower room's tall door closing behind him.

I crept noiselessly down the corridor toward it, crouched with pounding heart outside it. Voices again were coming out to me from within, the muffled voices of Dain and the others.

"——could not talk with you with Darley about the place in the daytime," Dain was saying, "but I must know your progress. The bromidic gases, Braumer —have you worked out any way of using them?"

"I have thought of a method that will I think work," replied the German. "Molecular compression will make it possible to store enough gases in one small plane to dissolve all matter above ground in a great city, to annihilate its structures and its life alike."

I caught my breath as I listened to those dread words, but Dain was speaking again.

"That's what is wanted," he said, "and if your method proves successful, Braumer, it will make a terrific weapon. But you, Morson—you were to outline your plan of attack tonight."

And while I listened with dread light flooding every corner of my mind, I heard Morson, the psychologist whose work had been hailed throughout the world as one of the greatest aids to humanity, give in his precise voice a considerable plan by which the awful weapons that Dain and his associates had gathered here might be launched at humanity.

The first blow would be struck by a score of the radio-controlled planes designed by Mendana, which would each wing out from the mountain's top over the world to one of earth's great cities. Each would unload upon that city its cargo of the deadly bromidic gases of Braumer, gases that could dissolve steel and stone and living flesh and almost all other substances like sugar in water.

This would be followed at once by the second attack, in which other manless planes would fly forth to drop loads of the continuing explosives to cripple the world's communications and organizations, while still others would loose Yokuni's poisons in the waters of an unsuspecting world. Then the ultimatum to be flashed from the mountain's top by radio, summoning the world to submit to the power that could loose further terrible blows upon it. And if that ultimatum were refused, the last step necessary to bring earth beneath the new tyranny, the step of——

"The step of plague!" said Dain, coldly. "The step of plague, of the broadcasting by the planes of masses of earth's most virulent bacteria of disease. And for the preparation of those bacteria, for the knowledge that alone can achieve it, I have here now one of the foremost bacteriologists on earth — Darley, who soon shall join in this work."

I reeled against the door, stunned. So *this* was the dread secret of all the mystery I had sensed about me, this the reason of Dain's invitation! He was planning to make me one of the band of twelve helpers who were plotting with him this terrific onslaught upon earth, these twelve of earth's greatest minds who were planning with Dain to bring it beneath their mastery! To induce or force me to become the thirteenth of his helpers and to use my bacteriological knowledge to spread dread plague over the world!

"——and Darley thus will be one of you," he was saying. "But no more tonight—I want to take no chances of rousing him. After tomorrow night he will be one of you."

I heard again the clicking from inside

and knowing that it meant his emergence from the room leaped silently away from the door and back along the corridor to my room like one pursued by phantoms. Hardly had I gained it when Dain was stalking softly down the corridor, to pause at my door as before and then enter his own room.

And when all was silent again and I crouched with the thin starlight shafting through the window beside me, surely never was there before such fear and horror as I felt then. For now at last the riddle of the mountain top lay open before me, and I knew why Braumer and Mitchell and the others had vanished from their lecture halls and laboratories to foregather here with Dain. They, the finest scientific minds on earth, had gathered here to fasten on earth a rule of horror.

And they could do it! Dain and the others could do it, could send forth from the mountain the manless planes that Mendana had devised, to rain the deadly dissolving gases or the crashing explosives or the spreading poisons upon any part of earth's surface! Could send forth death and destruction to ride the winds and rain horror on the unsuspecting world! Even now, for all I knew, the planes might be packed in the building's great basement, awaiting assembly, and even now the gases and explosives might be ready with them!

Stunned, my fear and astonishment of the preceding night a thousand-fold intensified, I sought for some way by which I might prevent the loosing of the horrors they had prepared here. To flee from the mountain to warn the world was useless, for Dain would then release the terror on earth before ever I could give my warning. There was but one chance, I told myself, and that was to endeavor to turn the others from Dain's mad plan. It had sounded to me as though some of them were restive beneath his domination, and it seemed incredible to me that these men, many of whom I had known — the laughing Mitchell, the great-souled Braumer, the brilliant and mellow-minded Morson—that these should follow Dain's leadership in precipitating such horrors on the world.

I would wait until the next night, I decided, and then would force my way, pistol in hand, into that tower room where the twelve scientists were concealed, and do my best to turn them from this terrible plan of Dain's. And if I could not do that, I resolved, I would at least slay as many of them as might be to prevent their work, at least, from going on.

IT SEEMS now to have been an eternity that I awaited the dawn. With its gray light there came Dain also, with his calm greeting, and knowing now what lay behind the mask of his cordiality it strained my powers of deception to the utmost to hide from him the horror he inspired in me. I do not know whether he sensed anything of this, but I was much relieved when after breakfast he took himself off to the laboratories as on the preceding day.

I knew now, though, what dread work was going on in those laboratories, and in the tower room, what terrible weapons were being prepared there to fasten the tyranny of Dain and his associates upon the world. And the knowledge steeled my purpose and steadied my strained nerves, so that through the day as I loitered with apparent lazy carelessness about the building and clearing, it was with resolve firmly fixed upon that which I would do that night. Dain, I noticed, spent almost all the day in preparations of some sort in the tower room, though I heard none of the voices of the others.

Night came at last, a night that I was never to forget. Dain and I were unus-

ually silent as we ate that evening, and afterward. He was occupied, I knew, with the gigantic plans of evil that he and his associates were carrying on, while I was filled with the purpose that was strengthening in me. At last, after a period of desultory conversation that was a torture to me to carry on, Dain rose and stretched.

"Well, tomorrow I'll let you in on the great secret, Darley," he told me. "I'm coming to the finish of the work that brought me here, and I'll show it all to you in the morning."

I nodded. "Just as you like," I replied. "I'll be glad to see what brought you here, of course."

"In the morning, then," he said. "And I think, Darley, that I can show you some things you've never seen before."

With that we parted, at the doors of our opposite rooms. This night I removed none of my clothing, though, only moving about as though doing so and then remaining silent as though retired. With pistol in hand I waited in the dark room, listening. At last, after what seemed a vigil of hours, I heard Dain emerge softly from his room, again pause and listen, and then move quietly down the corridor.

As on the preceding night, when I heard the click of the tower room's door locking, I crept forth into the corridor and down it. Only God knows now what doubts and fears were in my mind that night as I crept down the hall on Dain's track toward what would have blasted my brain had I known of it then. On—on—softly and silently I came for a third time to the cylindrical room's door, and as I came to it I heard issuing from within, even as I had expected, Dain's voice.

"——know what each of you has to do, and know that it must be done," he was saying, his voice cold, wrathful, sinister. "Mitchell—Jorgenson—I want no more of this talk from you! You, Jorgenson, have you worked out the radio-controlled load-release for the planes?"

"That will not be hard, Dain," came the muffled voice of Jorgenson. "It will need, though, a different frequency control-wave than the control of the planes' flight."

"And the projector for the N-rays, Mitchell?" Dain asked. "Have you devised any reliable one yet? With the planes, gases, explosives and poisons perfected, and with Darley joining for the bacteriological or plague part, our only remaining need is a long-distance projector of the flesh-withering N-Rays to protect the mountain itself from attack. Have you any idea for one?"

There was a silence for a moment, while I crouched with heart thumping, and then the rapid voice of Mitchell.

"Dain—no! I'll devise no projectors for you—I'll take no more part in this horror you're planning to loose on earth! Horror, horror—you have had horror enough here, surely, without releasing it on all the world. I'll plan no more weapons for you in spite of your power over me! And you—the rest of you—Braumer—Barrois—will you give this devil more power to make a hell of earth? You think you hold us in your grasp, Dain, but I tell you that I'll not obey you more!"

And as Mitchell's wrathful voice broke there came the passionate quick voices of the others. "No more, Dain—we will not help you more——!"

"Do you forget my power over you?" Dain's voice cut across theirs in cold, terrible menace. "Do you all forget the whip of pain I hold over you?"

There was silence inside at his words, a dread silence thick with unspoken terror that reached out through the door and closed upon my heart with a numbing fear no wildest shriek could hold.

Then came the swift snap of a switch, and in the next moment there sounded from inside a chorus of low wails of utter, gasping pain that rose from Mitchell and Braumer and all the twelve inside, rising in a heart-piercing crescendo to screams of utter agony!

The sobbing, awful screams echoed through all the building on the sleeping mountain's top in fearful chorus, and at the hearing of them something seemed to snap in my mind. I rose to my feet, drew back, and then just as the switch inside snapped again and the screams ceased, threw myself forward in a mad rush against the door, felt it splinter before me, and then with pistol in hand had burst inside! And then, just inside the big round white-lit room, I stood petrified, transfixed.

For Dain alone stood before me in that room!

His face a white mask of fury, he had whirled from a switch-panel on the wall to face me. I saw dimly in that first moment that the great room was quite windowless, and that at the center of its floor was sunk a long, coffin-like recess lined with strange, shining metal that was pierced at sides and bottoms with many small holes. Around the round room's walls were ranged twelve metal cabinets almost my own height, each filled with close-grouped humming little mechanisms. And from the top of each —from the top of each, oh God!—there projected the living head of a man!

Those heads—they were looking toward me with wide eyes, were shouting hoarsely to me—those heads without bodies, projecting from cabinets of lifeless mechanisms! They were shouting even as my eyes moved from one to the other, silent thunderblasts of horror riving my mind as I recognized the features of one and of another! Mitchell—Braumer—Morson—all the twelve I had heard—and heads only, living, conscious, seeing, shouting yet bodiless heads! There was a thirteenth similar cabinet, from which no head projected, but three metal tubes and two or three flexible clips. But I saw only the twelve heads—the twelve heads——

"Darley! Darley!" Their strange hoarse voices rang from about the room. "Darley!—Dain's work all this——!"

"Dain's work—yes!" cried Dain, as he leaped and gripped me.

TRANSFIXED I stood immovable with brain giving beneath that weight of horror, and before I could move Dain had grasped the pistol from my nerveless hand, had pinioned my arms to my body with thick wire, was crying it again in mad triumph to me and to them.

"Dain's work—yes! I, Dain, the master of earth's greatest minds and soon through them the master of earth itself! Twelve of earth's greatest scientists here in this room—their bodies annihilated, their heads, their brains and minds, living on with the mechanisms below each keeping it in life, pumping blood through it in place of a heart, speaking instead of lungs for it with mechanical phonograph voice! Twelve of earth's greatest scientists living now in their heads only—twelve of earth's greatest minds gathered here, and I their master!

"You knew, Darley, how I had worked at the Foundation and had kept the heads of animals living artificially after destroying their bodies instantaneously with gases. You heard something of the uproar there was there when I wanted to go on and do what other biologists had not dared to do, keep human heads living in the same way. But you did not guess that when I came here it was to show those fools that I could do it and in the showing make myself the master of them and of the world!

"One by one I gathered them here, my twelve greatest minds. First Mitchell and Braumer, writing them excitedly of a marvelous discovery I had made, warning them to tell no one when they came to see it. And when they came, how easy to drug them and overpower them, to place each in that recess on the floor before you! Then a turn of this knob on the switch-panel, and into the recess from the openings in sides and bottom rushed the gases that instantly dissolved the body. The head, projecting up and out of the shallow recess, was not affected by the flowing, dissolving gases, and with its body thus instantly disintegrated below the neck could be lifted and set instantly, before death reached the brain, upon the cabinet or mechanical body prepared for it, the simple blood-stream and speech and nerve-end connections almost automatically made. And then those heads could live on as they have lived upon these cabinets, mechanisms that pump through them blood constantly purified and nourished by chemical means!

"Mitchell—Braumer—Barrois—Mendana—one by one I lured them here, and one by one added their heads, their minds, to the group of which I am master. They could see and think as well as ever, could hear and could speak to me when I switched on their voices, and they knew that I was their master! For I needed only to lessen the force of the bloodstream pumped through their heads to burn their brains with agony. And with this whip of pain held over them I forced them to plan and devise for me out of their supreme scientific knowledge the weapons that would give me mastery of the world!

"Each was forced to plan for me one of the weapons I needed, whether it was physical or chemical or electrical or aeronautical in nature, and I needed but to carry out their plans. So that even now beneath this building lie my gathering forces, my great tanks of bromidic gases that dissolve steel and stone and flesh and almost all other matter, my dissembled manless planes and stores of explosives and poisons. Only masses of deadly plague germs are lacking among those weapons, and you, Darley, shall make it possible for me to have them also. For your bacteriological knowledge made yours the thirteenth and last mind over which I must have mastery, the thirteenth head for which even now that remaining cabinet is waiting!"

Dain laughed in insane pride, and as I swayed, slumped to the floor overcome with sheer horror, he grasped me, was moving me swiftly across the floor to the metal, coffin-like recess sunken in it. I heard as though through great spaces the wild shouts of the twelve heads around the room as they cried madly to Dain, felt that my pinioned body was resting in the recess with head and neck projecting up and out from it. The metal lining, I knew, was one of the rare substances that could resist the dissolving gases, and when they poured into the recess my body would be dissolved instantly in it, my head resting unharmed at the recess' edge.

The whole scene, the white-lit circular room, the twelve cabinets around it, the twelve heads with the horror-distended eyes and shouting, hoarse voices, the figure of Dain as he set the mechanisms of the waiting cabinet humming—all spun in a fearful kaleidoscope about me. Then Dain was at the switch-panel, his hand on the knob at its corner——

"Your time now, Darley!" he cried as his hand closed on the knob. "Your time to give to that waiting cabinet my thirteenth head, my thirteenth mind!"

"Dain! Dain!" The voices of all the twelve were frantic, awful. "Not

another, Dain! Not Darley in this hell of neither life nor death you put us in! For the pity of God, Dain, not another!"

"A moment more, Darley, and your body will trouble you no more!" Dain cried, half turning from me with his grasp tightening on the knob.

A moment more—and my body would be dissolved, my head with its living brain and senses lifted and placed on that waiting cabinet! A moment more and I would be hurled into that lifeless life beside which death was desirable, and my mind and knowledge would be Dain's to help him spread terror across the earth! At the thought a sudden wild fury surged through my horror-numbed body and with a convulsive, giant effort I burst the wire that pinioned me and leapt from the metal-lined recess toward Dain, even as he wheeled from the switch-panel toward me!

We met—clutched each other, and with a mad fury holding each of us, whirled there in the white-lit room! Smiting, struggling, wrestling, striving with insane strength to subdue each other, we spun there, while from all around us there rang in our ears the wild cries of the twelve living heads, shouting crazily for me to subdue Dain, to torture him, to kill him! Insane battle out of nightmare it was, with the twelve terrible heads shouting us on!

A great blow—and Dain was down, but had leapt up and to one side as I rushed, had grasped me again. I spun with him again in a straining embrace, but another blow failed to shake his grip. His right arm was closing round my throat in a deadly hold, and as we reeled out from the wall I put all my strength into a wild push that sent him sprawling away from me toward the room's center, staggering and falling into the metal-lined recess and lying for an instant in it as I had lain but moments before, with head projecting! But before I could leap toward him, still lying there, he had with a lightning motion drawn the pistol from his pocket and leveled it at my heart!

But at the same moment, almost without volition, my hand had flashed to the switch-panel beside me and had turned the knob!

Countless tiny jets of gray vapor seemed instantly to pour forth from the openings in the sides and bottom of the metal-lined recess in which Dain lay. As they did so I saw his eyes widen, his body and upraised arm motionless as though petrified beneath the flowing flood of vapor that filled the recess; then his body crumbled away in that vapor, dissolving and disintegrating in a moment. And then the body was gone and there lay on the edge of the vapor-filled recess the unharmed head, with its lower neck disintegrated and severed, and with that astonished, wide-eyed stare frozen upon it.

I FOUND myself staggering, sobbing thickly, and from all around the room, from all the twelve heads that had seen our battle and its ending, there came wilder and more terrible shouts.

"Darley—Darley!" Their cries raged about me like a mad babel of sound. "Darley—give Dain the hell he gave us —the thirteenth cabinet waiting, Darley —the thirteenth head!"

As though hypnotized by those mad cries, scarce knowing what I was doing, scarce aware of anything but the supreme driving horror of those wild shouts about me, I reeled forward, lifted from the recess' edge the bodiless head of Dain, staggered with it like an automaton toward the thirteenth cabinet and its humming mechanisms.

The cries from the twelve heads around the room had replaced my own will with their fierce urgings. I placed the head in

the waiting niche on the cabinet's top—the speech-tube slipping into the windpipe's opening—connecting, as the twelve about the room cried their fierce, exultant instructions to me, the blood-tubes to the severed arteries—the clips to the gray nerve-ends—turning on the mechanism of the blood-stream's pump with dazed, mechanical movements as the cries came still from about me—my own brain inoperative. And then — I reeled back choking—and then the muscles of Dain's face were twitching and moving—the eyes opening, staring—and from the writhing lips of his bodiless head there on the cabinet's top, sounds—thick, distorted sounds as of one learning to speak again——

"Dain! Dain! Dain!" The twelve heads were shrieking their mad, triumphant cries into my numbed brain. "Dain —one of us now yourself! The thirteenth mind you wanted, the thirteenth head, Dain—*your own!*"

"Darley!" It was the supreme horror, Dain's thick, twisted voice. "Darley! Give me death—death for us all—that brass wheel on the switch-panel releases the gases below—death, Darley, for the pity of God, death!"

And from all the others then the same mad cry. "Death for us all, Darley, for God's sake! Death — death — death — death—death!"

Staggering sidewise, the power to move fast deserting me, I groped blindly upon the wall, found the switch-panel and then the brass wheel on it, turned it, turned it again until above the mad chorus of insane cries from the thirteen heads about me there came from beneath the loud hissing of suddenly released gases. As it sounded I reeled with the last remnant of my strength and reason out of that horror-filled room of the thirteen heads, out through the corridor and through the room beyond, out of the building into the darkness as from behind came a swift cracking and crashing.

Mindlessly I reeled on across the starlit clearing, and then as I sank to the ground at its edge I turned and saw the long white building at its center crumbling, disintegrating, dissolving like sugar in water as there burst up inside and around it a great cloud of billowy gray vapor. In a moment, almost, there was left of it but a great excavation in the ground in which gleamed a few bits of metal. And the wind, blowing strong over me and across the clearing, whirled upward and into the night the gray vapor that alone remained of the menace to earth that had gathered there, the gray vapor that had swept into a desired death Dain and the minds he had mastered until their prison of horror had become at last his own.

The GRAVE at GOONHILLY

by G. G. PENDARVES

"I saw Valsume's familiars leer and peep—felt the heat and stench."

"THAT man looks to me like James Burnham," I said to myself, as from an upper deck of the *S. S. Perran* I watched the tall, arresting figure of a man get out of a taxi on Southampton Docks and make toward the gangway of my ship. He stepped on deck only a few yards from where I stood, so that I got a closer look at him.

"No, not the Burnham I met a year ago," I concluded. "This one is a good fifteen or twenty years older, but it's an extraordinary likeness."

Not until dinner did I discover that my first impression had been correct after all. This old haggard man was indeed the James Burnham I had met at the Goonhilly Golf Club only twelve months earlier. He was my sole companion at one of the small tables in the saloon and recognized me at once.

"I wasn't quite sure," I answered, shocked at the change in him. "You don't—you don't look as fit as when I saw you last year down in Cornwall." It was incredible that one year could have reduced the big easy-going man I remembered to this haggard wreck. He was like some sturdy forest tree struck by lightning. What blind merciless chance had marred him thus?

"I suppose I am altered; everyone tells me so," he replied in a flat, disinterested voice. Then he added with sudden passion, "What does it matter how I look, how I feel, if only I can find him? I *will* find him—I will follow him—to the edge of the world and beyond!"

His voice sank to a hoarse whisper on the last words, and I marveled at the passionate earnestness of them. Then, lapsing into a dull silence and apparently forget-

ting me completely, he sat crumbling his bread and looking at his soup as if it contained a riddle he was trying to solve.

For the next two days I encountered him only at meals, when he would sit eating like a bird, making a few abrupt remarks to me or to the steward, and taking refuge in long silences; when, completely abstracted from his surroundings, he appeared to be wrestling with some terrific mental problem.

We had a rough passage, and by the third night out the very limited number of passengers was so substantially reduced that Burnham and I had the smokeroom to ourselves, when he joined me there after dinner. He sat down by me and smoked —if you could call it smoking! His method was to light a cigarette, give a few nervous puffs, and then let the thing go out between his fingers. He filled an ash tray with matches and wasted cigarettes in the fifteen minutes which elapsed before he spoke.

"Do you remember Donald Harkness?"

He fired the question at me so abruptly that I started and gazed blankly at the drawn, colorless face of my vis-à-vis.

"Harkness?" I repeated vaguely. "Donald Harkness? The name is familiar. A golfer, wasn't he? Ah, yes—I have it now: that young friend of yours at the Goonhilly Club."

Burnham nodded, his eyes bleak with some desperate unhappiness, and passed his tongue over dry lips.

"Of course!" I added almost enthusiastically as memory revived. "Donald Harkness was the man who never could play off the fifth tee!"

My last words seemed to galvanize Burnham like a sudden electric shock.

"The fifth tee! He played off that tee in the end!" he cried out in a hoarse sudden voice. "He drove as that devil intended he should drive at the last—and that's why I'm here," he added, falling back in his chair, his features working convulsively, his fists clenched on the arms of his big leather-covered seat.

I was dumfounded. What did the man mean? It had been a stock joke at the Goonhilly Club about young Donald and the fifth tee; he never drove more than a few yards from it, and was invariably rather upset. I'd seen him step off that tee looking quite white and sick, and he had a queer trick of glancing back over his shoulder as he did so. Everyone had ragged him about it, and he had taken it all in good part, but at the same time he had never mastered the curious nervousness that beset him at that particular tee during the whole month I had spent at Goonhilly.

Burnham met my puzzled eyes and gave the worst imitation of a laugh I ever heard; then, leaning forward, he put a hand on my knee.

"Listen, Vyner," he said with great earnestness; "I am going to tell you the whole beastly story—for beastly it is, and incredible to most people. But you're a writer; it's your business to understand, to learn the hidden things—those awful hidden forces that lie in wait for us, luring us, trapping us, betraying us, dragging us down to hells of our own making!"

I assented silently, feeling the desperate need of the man, and nerving myself to try to understand. I had the sensation of being on a rock, seeing a man struggling in a swirl of angry waters just beyond my reach.

"I know from our talks that summer in Cornwall that you do not hold conventional ideas of life and death, of body and soul," continued Burnham, speaking with more calm. "You do not allow yourself to be driven along the broad, easy path of public opinion. No; your mind is alive and growing, not root-bound and moss-covered. I can tell *you* what happened

at that fifth tee—and you're the only man I know who would not think me mad—the only man who could comprehend the hellish trick that was played on Donald Harkness. And perhaps—perhaps you can help me to find the *Thing* I seek!

"THERE was twenty years difference betwen Donald and myself," began my companion, leaning toward me across the intervening baize-topped table, his hands nervously occupied with an elephant-shaped match-receptacle. "My travels and adventures intrigued the boy immensely," he continued. "He cherished a sort of hero-worship for me, as boys do, you know. I had promised to take him on one of my shorter trips to Asia when he was through college—it was arranged for this year. This year!" he groaned; "and Donald is——"

"Did he die?" I ventured, as Burnham sat staring into space.

"Die? No, at least, not what is usually known as death. It's worse—far worse than that." And he began to make patterns with the matches until I could wait no longer.

"About the fifth tee," I put in. "Why couldn't Harkness play off that fifth tee?"

"I told you he *did* play off it." Burnham lifted desperate eyes to mine. "He played and was lost—lost and damned! If only I had traced the history of Goonhilly Downs a week—even a day earlier! If only I had discovered——"

"Yes—if you had discovered?" I ventured.

Burnham placed two more matches, stared vacantly at the pattern forming under his hands; then his haunted eyes met mine.

"That fifth tee." His words were a mere husky whisper which made my flesh creep. "That fifth tee, as far as Donald was concerned, was not merely a little patch of turf: it was a borderland between the seen and the unseen—a sort of No Man's Land! Danger—the most hideous danger—met the boy there; a danger he had no means of understanding or combating!"

He sank back, and the look of gray despair on his face chilled me to the heart. Suddenly the temptation seized me to get up and go away—to refuse to hear more of Burnham's story, but he looked up and read the fear and doubt in my eyes.

"Vyner, for God's sake don't turn your back on me! Listen to me, or I shall go mad. There is no one else—*no one*—who can understand. You have had glimpses of what lies beyond the veil—you know—you *know*."

I shuddered, and a long silence fell between us, while Burnham sat forward, his eyes beseeching me dumbly, his whole soul hanging on my answer.

"Very well," I said, dully. "I'll listen, Burnham. If I must—I'll listen."

"You must—indeed you must," he urged. "It may seem selfish and cruel to put my burden on you, to ask you to fight against such tremendous odds. But I do ask you. What *are* my happiness and health—what are yours in comparison with——?" His voice failed, and he put a shaking hand over his eyes.

"I ARRIVED home from North China shortly before meeting you twelve months ago," resumed Burnham, "and went straight down to Cornwall. The Harkness home was always my headquarters while I was in England, and I always received a rapturous welcome from the family. Donald was the youngest of seven tall sons, and my favorite. He met me at Truro station with his sports car, prepared to drive me the ten miles to Goonhilly.

"I saw instantly that he was terribly changed. I had left a sturdy youngster of seventeen, and found a young man, re-

pressed and melancholy in manner and looking years older.

" 'Have you been overworking or overtraining?' I asked, as soon as we were well out of the city's narrow ways. 'You look rather a wreck, my boy!'

" 'Yes,' he assented in a disinterested voice. 'I suppose so.'

"Astonished at his apathy, I did not follow up my remark, and we spun on in silence past trees and tall hedges.

" 'I think I am going mad,' he said at last. 'I've been waiting for you to help me. Perhaps—perhaps you can explain the thing! It's—it's a delusion.'

" 'Good Lord! Delusions at your age? But if you know it is a delusion I don't quite see how you are deluded,' I objected, trying to laugh off his extraordinary solemnity.

"He looked at me, and laughter died out of me very suddenly.

" 'It's since I came down from Oxford,' the boy continued, 'just this last month. But you—you must be able to explain; you've seen so many strange things, you *must* be able to explain! If you can't—if you can't—why then—then——' he broke off, and fear, like a furtive darting flame, peeped from under his eyelids at me.

" 'I'll tell you more tomorrow, Burnie,' he went on. I'd been Burnie to him since he was a little nipper in a blue sailor suit. 'We'll go out on the links after breakfast. Perhaps if you are with me—it—it may not come! But if it does, perhaps you will understand—make me understand! God! if you could only do that!' he added under his breath.

"Next morning we were out early on the Goonhilly Downs, where a very fine eighteen-hole course was laid. It ran along by the sea, a long, rather narrow course with many natural bunkers in the shape of rush-strewn hillocks. I never played on any course I liked so well; the tang of the salt sea and wild thyme, the roar of great waves breaking in mile-long furrows, the wind-driven clouds and screaming gulls, the free wildness of the place never failed to make me feel like a two-year-old.

"As we approached the fifth tee I looked about me and grinned appreciatively.

" 'Just the same pixy-haunted old place! Queer thing, my boy,' I spoke over my shoulder to Donald. 'This little corner of Goonhilly Downs is as desolate and forbidding as the Gobi desert; wonderful how a few square yards of turf and sand can convey such an impression. This bit ahead is positively sinister!'

"Donald teed up in a tremendous hurry and lifted his club, but in the very act he drew back sharply and struck the ball a feeble tap which sent it rolling into a patch of muddy grass a few yards away.

" 'Hard luck!' I told him. 'Try another.'

" 'No,' his voice was queerly hoarse. 'That's my usual drive off this tee. I had hoped that you—that you——'

"I was surprized at his tone, and when he left his ball in the mud and walked on with me after my own drive, I was positively staggered.

" 'What's the idea?' I asked.

" 'I give you three strokes,' he replied, 'and start off from here.' He put down a new ball in the rough and took up his mashie.

" 'Well!' I said, as soon as words occurred to me. 'You spoke about your delusions last night. I hope one of them isn't that this sort of thing is golf!'

" 'It's the sort of golf I play off the fifth tee,' was the grave reply.

"IT WAS ten days before I found myself alone with Donald on the links again. He had steadily avoided me, and refused to discuss himself or his delusions again.

But he had continued to play his daily round of golf with anyone but myself.

"At the fifth tee I watched him narrowly as he prepared to drive off. I caught the look of loathing on his face, the muscles working at the angle of his jaw, the nervously distended nostrils, and stiff tension of his whole body. Evidently he was putting some abnormal compulsion on himself, and when he lifted his club I held my breath, for his face turned absolutely gray, and his features twisted in a contortion that looked like a grin.

"A grin of agony! In the East I had come across more than one helpless slave, dead or dying, with that same dreadful mask which Donald wore. With the wretched slaves the reason was cruelly apparent, but this boy! Utterly appalled I made a blind, clumsy movement toward him, but in the same moment he let his club swing down aimlessly and his ball rolled forward a few yards and lay in the mud as before.

"He would not meet my eye but walked stiffly from the tee, to put down a new ball in the rough some distance away.

" 'Don't you think you had better tell me?' I asked him very quietly.

" 'I want to tell you,' he muttered. 'I want to tell you more than anything in the world. But there's nothing—nothing! It's only that I imagine—it's just a delusion.'

" 'But delusions can be cured,' I reminded him gently. 'If you will tell me!'

"He hesitated, his eyes fixed on the distant sea, with a misery I could not bear to see in them.

" 'I'll try to understand,' I added.

" 'It's just this,' he began. 'I want to tell you more than I want anything, but I'm afraid——'

" 'Afraid I won't understand?' I ventured.

" 'No, no, not that! I am afraid that if I speak—if I tell anyone, it may be worse for me. It's as if I might be opening a cage for a wild beast, once I put the thing into words.'

" 'I don't think suppression is good for any delusion,' I countered. 'The sanest way is to drag the thing out in the open, get it up by its roots. A delusion is a plant that grows in darkness and secrecy, and withers in free open space.'

"The boy's tired face lit up with a momentary gleam of hope.

" 'Yes—yes, it should be so!' he murmured. But still he debated within himself, longing, yet fearing to plunge into confession.

"At last he picked up his ball, shouldered his clubs, and put his arm through mine. 'I'll tell you. But not here in sight of that place! Come down by the sea.'

"He dived abruptly into speech, as we sat down in a hollow among the dunes, a good half-mile from the fifth tee.

" 'It's the hands. It's the hands that close over mine! Cold hands—hard as iron! There is something always waiting for me there—it wants me—it wants me!' His voice sank to a whisper. 'I know that if I give in once—just once—I shall be its slave. It is always there—waiting—waiting!'

" 'Give in?' I echoed feebly. 'How give in?'

" 'Those hands!' the boy's hoarse rapid undertone was like that of someone in a delirium. 'Those hands that hold mine—they try to make me drive as they want—to guide my aim—to use me somehow! But they can't—they can't unless I give in.'

"I put an arm about his shaking body.

" 'Don—you poor tormented boy!' I spoke hesitatingly, afraid of checking his confidence. 'This is worse than I had dreamed it could be. You can't stand any more torture of this sort—no one could. Tell me, why do you play off that tee at

all? Why not give up golf altogether, or miss out that fifth tee at any rate.'

" 'I dare not.' The words were scarcely audible.

" 'Dare not stop playing?'

" 'Not now! It would follow me—it would find me anywhere! Those hands would drag me back! I have to stop and fight it out on that tee.'

" 'But Donald!' I remonstrated, terribly moved by his unnatural quiet fatalism. 'How are you going to fight it out? Do you mean you will go on until your—your delusion dies?'

" 'Or until I do,' he replied calmly.

" 'That is morbid, Don,' I said sternly. 'You must not allow yourself that thought in any extremity. It's a terrifying, a most mysterious hallucination you have, but I'm convinced that you can't cure it by your Spartan method. Get right away from here at once; this place is poison to you in your present state of mind.'

" 'I can't,' he said very quietly.

"I SAID nothing to the boy's parents, who were old and easily alarmed, and Donald had taken no one save myself into his confidence; but the next day I took the Cornish Riviera express up to town and on arrival made an appointment with Volsung—the famous alienist—for the following morning.

"That done, I wandered aimlessly about the streets, and finally made for the British Museum with the intention of looking up a few knotty points in connection with a book I was writing.

"I was haunted by Goonhilly and Donald so persistently, however, that when I came across an old battered volume entitled *Ye Anciente Duchy of Cornwall,* I became immediately absorbed.

"It had been written by a Cornish priest, a famous divine of the Sixteenth Century, and was a curious rambling piece of work, covering an enormous variety of subjects. It included fragments of diaries, memoirs, tags of folk-lore, and records of crime and romance which the writer had culled from many different sources.

"Finally I came across a reference to Goonhilly: *The Parish of Goonhilly—Lord Goonhilly—Taxation—Restoration of Church,* etc., etc., all very prosy and detailed until I saw the name of Adrian Valsume! It was like coming across a black snake in a bed of primroses. Ever heard of Adrian Valsume?"

Burnham shot the question at me abruptly and I nodded silently.

My companion repeated the name "Adrian Valsume" with an accent which was emphasized by the loathing on his face.

"A devil!" continued Burnham. "As child, as youth, as man he was abnormal and utterly evil. Brilliant, cunning and degenerate, he reached manhood and inherited vast possessions in Spain, each year becoming more powerful, more of a menace to his day and generation. By poison and treachery and monstrous cruelties, and above all by a fixed deadly purpose that no spark of humanity ever deflected, this Adrian Valsume wielded unparalleled power. Finally he threw in his lot with and became the leader of a terrible sect of ex-monks who had settled in the south of Spain.

"Valsume, having attained to this giddy pinnacle of power, naturally desired to remain there, until, finally, one supreme quest occupied him to the exclusion of all else. The quest of perpetual youth!

"He modeled himself on Gilles de Rais, Marshal of France—that monster who was hanged and burned for his inhuman crimes in the Fifteenth Century. But Valsume even exceeded de Rais, was more fiendishly ingenious in the torture he inflicted, more ruthless in the shedding of innocent blood.

"Like de Rais, he saw himself as a demi-

god, and like de Rais he believed that the shortest way to attain his supreme desire was by occult means. Alchemy and Black Magic were his mediums."

"But surely," I protested, "surely a man of such learning would never fool himself like that! Black Magic!"

"You forget Valsume lived in the Sixteenth Century. In those days such things were vitally important. The Elixir of Life and the Philosopher's Stone were considered practical and possible. To Valsume, unbalanced by his frightful excesses, the forbidden way of the Hermetic Art appeared the only way for him. He made up his mind to carry out the experiments which death had prevented Gilles de Rais from completing.

"All this was faithfully recorded by the Cornish priest in his *Anciente Duchy of Cornwall,"* commented Burnham, "and it was wonderfully accurate, for I had myself traced that infamous career, and was familiar with it all except the final scene in Valsume's life.

"That scene took place in Cornwall—in Goonhilly, of all places in the world! Valsume's despairing efforts to keep his youth pushed him into the wildest excesses and superstitions; and in his senility he gave credence to every *poseur* of his day.

"A certain Wise Woman of Goonhilly was brought to his notice and he sought her out. Under her direction he carried on his old devil's game of stealing and murdering children to sacrifice to his 'demon.'

"The half-burned body of one of his victims was found and identified by the poor demented mother. Young and strong and crazed with grief, she had no fear of the man whose black shadow darkened a whole continent. She lay in wait for him on the Goonhilly Downs, the long knife she used in her fish trade clutched in her hand.

"She waited and she found him at last, and killed him with one strong blow to the heart. Later, the villagers, amongst them the Cornish priest himself, found her there by the body, babbling and laughing and singing wild old songs, her black hair streaming on the wind as she sang.

"Valsume's bones were left to rot there in the marshes, and gradually became covered by the drifting sands; but according to the chronicler, ever afterward that sand remained a barren ugly patch, six feet by four, neither grass nor weed grew there, and year after year it kept its grim outline, never altering by so much as an inch."

Burnham leaned forward, letting a handful of matches slip to the floor, and added grimly, "From that unhallowed grave came—came the Horror of the fifth tee!"

"What—what?" I stammered. "You mean that Valsume——"

"Yes—Valsume!" was the reply. "His earth-bound spirit haunted the place through all the centuries—and after all, four hundred years is neither more nor less than four seconds. Time is only a convenient human invention, a sort of little foot-rule we use."

"Yes, I understand that," I replied. "But all those years—did—did the—did Valsume never make himself felt before? Why should Donald have suffered? What did the—thing at the fifth tee want?"

"There are Laws," observed Burnham. "In every state of being there are always Laws. For four hundred years Valsume has watched and waited his chance, and fought to get back."

"To get back?" I echoed uncertainly. "But you say he was always there—at Goonhilly."

"But not in the body. The shadow-life to which Valsume was condemned held no pleasure or gratification for either sense or spirit! It was a body—a human habitation he fought to regain."

"And has he?—did he?"

"Judge for yourself," was the grim reply. "In the gray dawn of the following day I arrived back at Goonhilly, and made straight for the links. I ran like a demented thing, stumbling over hillocks and rabbit-burrows with the ghostly whisper of the incoming tide in my ears, the cold sea-mist drifting across my face.

"The fifth tee! My eyes went to that as to a magnet as I approached it, but nothing unusual was there—the mat and the little red sand-box—that was all!

"I stumbled to my knees beside it and stared unbelievingly, so certain had I been of finding Donald there. Donald or——

"I got to my feet, looked across the marsh where the sea-mist curled and lifted like vapor from a cauldron.

"Then my heart seemed to turn over in my breast. A figure lay face downward not fifty yards away. I reached the place breathless.

"Donald—yes, Donald! He lay huddled awkwardly over his golf-bag, as if he had stumbled and pitched forward, and when I turned him gently over, a bruise on his forehead showed where he had struck one of the gray boulders amongst which he lay.

"Then I noticed the golf ball. It was lying a few feet distant, on a rectangular patch of smooth sand, with clean-cut edges—a patch of sand where neither weed nor grass grew—a patch six feet by four!

"Adrian Valsume had won at last! He had got back!"

"But you said Donald——"

"No, it was not Donald I found after all—I had come too late to save him. He was gone — driven out into the dark — robbed of his own body that Valsume might once more walk this earth.

"*Donald had played off that fifth tee at last.* Maddened and despairing, he had chosen to end the unequal fight. He had let those devil's hands guide his own at last—had sent the ball to lie on the grave of Adrian Valsume—had followed after it!

"An accident was easy—inevitable on that uneven ground with its bogs and slime-covered boulders, especially to a fear-crazed, devil-driven boy! A stumble—a fall—oblivion!

"You see the trick?" Burnham asked. "In a state of unconsciousness the body is a shell—an empty, uninhabited shell! The soul—the spirit—the ego—call it what you will—wanders free.

"That's what happened to Donald. His soul, young, untried, terrorized by Valsume's fiendish hounding—his soul was set free there by Valsume's grave.

"What chance had the boy? What weapon of defense against the age-old cunning of Adrian Valsume? He had no chance—no chance!

"And I—what irony!" said Burnham savagely, "I labored to restore that empty shell of Donald's to life again—and I did it! I unlocked the door and let Valsume in!

"When those eyes opened on the world once more — eyes which had lately mirrored such terror and despair — they opened with a smile in them. Valsume's own evil self peeped from under the lids at me. He had come back to his world again, and life lay before him! What might he not achieve! This, and much more was in that first smiling sidelong glance at me."

"You didn't kill him?" I ventured.

"Kill whom? You mean did I destroy *Donald's* body, and rob the boy eternally of all chance of regaining what Valsume had stolen from him? No! That was unthinkable—a damnable treachery to Donald."

"But what will you do then?" I argued.

"Rob Valsume in his turn. Lure him from his chosen habitation to some other one, then extinguish the evil flame of his life like a foul lamp!"

"Where is he—Valsume? Is he still at Goonhilly with his—with the Harkness family?" I asked.

"No, no! He fled from England that night—was out of the country before he was missed."

"He recognized you—knew you for an enemy?" I persisted. "Why did he not kill you before he went?"

"Several reasons for that," responded Burnham. "He was injured and had to nurse his strength to get away, he was too clever to impersonate Donald with the Harkness crowd. Then, he did not want to run the risk of being hunted as a murderer, for he could hardly do away with me and leave the country immediately, without deductions being drawn.

"And again—and this last reason must have weighed heavily with Valsume—he preferred to play a cat and mouse game with me. He intends to kill me in his own time, and his own way; but my life and death are small matters, he has more important claims on his time and attention.

"My agony over Donald must amuse and gratify him intensely. He prefers that I should wait—and suffer!"

AT THIS point, Burnham drew out a big blue envelope, filled with newspaper-cuttings, all methodically dated and clipped.

"The trail of the serpent," he said. "He leaves it wherever he goes, a black trail of crime! Who but Valsume is responsible for these?" and Burnham pointed to the cuttings with trembling finger.

"All these—all these are his deviltry! During this last year I have followed his trail, and it was not difficult. Whenever I read of any peculiarly revolting and horrible crime I go to the place where it took place, and always—always—I find that Valsume has been in the neighborhood. Invariably his name — his stolen name—is recorded as a visitor in some hotel, or inn, in the city or village where these outrages occur. No one suspects; no one else connects him with these frightful occurrences, but I know — I *know!*"

"You have never seen him since he left Goonhilly?"

"Never," replied Burnham. "He moves like a streak of lightning, erratic, unaccountable, and like the lightning, he sears and destroys all he touches."

"How do you expect to find him? Are you relying on blind chance?"

"Chance! I don't believe in that, you know!" Burnham's eyes met mine with something of their old wise humor. "Things work out as we ourselves work them; there is no blind chance to give or snatch away. It is a question of will and purpose between Adrian Valsume and myself. My will — my purpose to destroy him, as a thing wholly and utterly evil! His will—his purpose to indulge the lust and pride and desire which for four hundred years have sought an outlet!

"He sailed on the *S. S. Ronder* ten days ago, from Cherbourg. In the New World, with its wealth, its boundless horizons, its colossal possibilities for good—and evil; there Valsume will find his kingdom!

"Will you help me to find him?—to destroy him?"

I put out my hand, and it was taken in an iron grip.

"You can count on me," I said, and I scarcely recognized my own voice. "I'll join you in your quest for Valsume, if it means wandering the earth for the rest of my life!"

A YEAR later—a lifetime of danger and terror and despair—found Burnham and myself standing in a dark, filthy street in downtown New York. It was close on midnight, and a thin wind piped dismally about us, while my heart beat up in my throat, and my brain was like a fiery wheel revolving in my head.

"Ready!" came Burnham's low voice in my ear, and I nodded, quite incapable of speech.

He took a few steps forward and was instantly swallowed up in the darkness of a low-arched passageway which ran between two of the battered tenement houses which surrounded us. I followed at his heels.

We entered a door—very familiar by this time — and climbed up flight after flight of narrow broken stairs. Brutish faces peeped at us from doorways and passages, the air was sour and fetid beyond words, and the sounds and noises arising on every hand in this hive we were disturbing, were scarcely human.

Sounds of quarrels, curses, blows, loud continuous laughter, and the wail of starving children mingled with the uproar of a cracked gramophone record, which ground on unrelenting through all the misery of that squalid house.

The eighth floor at last! Silence reigned here, and the air blew fresh and sweet through open windows in the roof of the long passage. No speck of dirt, no hint of disorder here. The deep red of the enameled walls shone like a sunset afterglow in the light of hanging alabaster lamps. The door before which we halted was sheathed in copper, its knocker fashioned of two interlacing jeweled triangles—the Seal of Solomon! The gleaming mockery of that mystic sign was a challenge to us and the purpose we had in our hearts.

An ugly little black mute admitted us without hesitation; for many weeks we had haunted his master's studio; for many weeks been wealthy, credulous students of magic art which Valsume taught there in these secret rooms of his. As secure as Buddha himself from the wild beasts of jungle and forest, so was Valsume secure from the human beasts among whom he lived. Remote and inaccessible as a god, he held his beasts under a spell of fear that cowed the strongest and most brutal.

No wonder that Burnham took twelve long months to trace his enemy! It might have been twelve long years, or twelve long lifetimes if Burnham had been a man like other men, and not possessed of an intelligence that cut through problems as acid cuts through solid steel.

To look at him as he stood at my side, no one would have accused him of possessing even average brains. His jaw had slackened, his eyes were vague and misted with dreams; he was the picture of a man who had chased will-o'-the-wisps from youth up. A man of little wit and no penetration; an enthusiastic follower of new creeds — gentle, guileless, imaginative, and utterly uncritical.

Here was clay to the hand of the potter! Here was an invaluable tool and medium for Valsume and his devil's work of snaring the souls of men.

It was amazing to me to watch Burnham as he donned his rôle for this last act; as he had donned it consistently throughout the whole of his encounters with Valsume since we had met six weeks ago in this very room, where we came ostensibly as disciples of the occult arts which Valsume professed.

It was truly amazing how Burnham had adopted his rôle of devotee and kept it up without a single break from start to this finish which would be concluded within this very hour. Amazing because Valsume had recognized Burnham from the first

encounter, and Burnham knew himself to be recognized!

In spite of the fact, the latter had persisted in being the obedient, teachable, enthralled disciple! And Valsume had obviously laughed in his sleeve and decided to humor an obstinate and foolish antagonist, who was pitting himself against a power which he had no knowledge to comprehend.

It was to be a fight with the buttons on the foils.

Valsume thoroughly appreciated the fact that Burnham hoped to come to grips with him through the medium of his own magic art. He realized that sooner or later Burnham meant to pit his will against his own, and fight out the long struggle for Harkness in a psychical rather than a physical arena.

Soul to soul they would meet—and let the most enduring win!

All this Valsume knew; he never disguised his knowledge, but he made it clear that he had no fear at all as to the issue of the combat.

And Burnham knew himself despised, knew that Valsume was merely playing a cat-and-mouse game for the pleasure of it, an amusing little prelude to an inevitable climax; knew that Valsume reckoned him already as his slave—soon, very soon to be in bondage, body and soul, for all eternity.

And yet Burnham played his rôle! More and more ecstatic and dreamy he became at each visit to the "Master," until I was bewildered and shaken in my own belief in Burnham. Could it really be all a pose?—or had Burnham fallen under the insidious spell of this cruel smiling fiend?

It was this doubt in my mind that undermined my courage, and turned my blood to ice as I watched what was either the most consummate acting ever achieved by man, or else the tottering of a great mind to its fall.

"Ah!—ah!—ah!" the hatefully familiar voice beat in my head like a gong. It was Valsume who stood under the opposite archway in the cabalistic robes he affected. "My pupils are prompt. I hope the lesson is well learnt, and that fear has left your minds."

"Fear has left our minds," murmured Burnham, a breathless awe in his voice; his eyes, fixed on Valsume, rapt as one who sees a vision of light.

"You are prepared for the final trial, the supreme test of your faith," continued Valsume. "You will give yourself into my hands, submit your very soul to my keeping without one fear, one doubt, one reserve."

"I am fully and absolutely prepared," was the low-breathed reply.

"So." Valsume's eyes were full of triumph. "Your friend shall bear witness for you and for me. He shall see the Great Mystery enacted. He shall watch me pluck the soul from your living body. Have you brought what I commanded?"

"It is here," I answered quickly, taking from my pocket a little feathered body—the cold stiffened shell of a frozen sparrow.

"Very charming, very poetical!" Valsume's voice was at its suavest. "So my pupil would have wings for his body as well as wings for his soul! A bird. Good! Within the hour that bird shall fly again. Within the hour"—Valsume turned to me—"you shall see the mystery of a soul translated from a man to a bird—a little helpless bird."

His voice sank on the last words with a subtle inflection which both Burnham and I understood very well.

Then I remembered the dog—that poor, wretched little beast which usually followed at Valsume's heels. I looked

round the room, and caught Burnham doing the same and I knew he was thinking the same thing as I was. If the dog had disappeared our plan had failed. If Valsume had done us the honor to take us seriously and destroyed the dog or even hidden it on this particular night—I dared not think along those lines—Valsume's dog, a wire-haired terrier, with the faithful heart-breaking eyes of its breed, clear brown as a peat stream in the sunlight.

The eyes of his dog—of his *dog!* The dumb agonized appeal in them, the horror and tragedy of them, haunted me day and night!

It was a human soul that looked out from them—a tortured imprisoned soul—the soul of Donald Harkness!

To set him free from his prison, to give back to him his human body tonight—this was Burnham's task, and this was the hour at last!

We waited in the low-ceilinged, perfumed room in silence, the sound of our own breathing loud in our ears, and suddenly we saw the dog. He stood in the doorway through which Valsume had passed, shivering and panting, and his eyes—ah, his eyes! My own burned with tears, but Burnham smiled as he would have smiled at some terrified child, tenderly reassuring.

Valsume's voice called abruptly, and the dog vanished; a moment later there was the swift whistling lash of a whip, and I saw Burnham's hand clench at his side, but he made no other movement.

PRESENTLY the mute was at our elbow like a shadow, urging us by gesture to follow. Valsume was waiting in the other room, where two throne-like seats and a small chair formed the furniture of the apartment. The walls were hung with gray cobweb draperies that made the place a little island shut off by four walls of impenetrable fog.

Valsume, from one of the throne-like seats, directed Burnham to the other at his side; while the mute guided me to the third chair and withdrew.

The dog, at a peremptory snap of Valsume's fingers, crouched to the floor and lay with its nose between its paws; I noticed a wet red stain on its thin flank.

Valsume leaned forward and clasped his hand about Burnham's wrist.

"Look into my eyes," he commanded. "Look deep and long—until thought and memory leave you. Look into my eyes and see only what I will you to see, until you have no sight of your own any more. Look into my eyes until you see deep into the vast dark which cradles the whole universe. Look into my eyes until you see past sun, moon, and stars. Look—look until the end and the beginning are all one—look, I command you—look!"

Burnham's body sagged in his enemy's grasp. His eyes were rapt, his face strangely luminous under the strong violet rays from a great lamp overhead.

I saw that the dog was shaking like a thing stricken by palsy, and its stricken eyes were also fixed unblinkingly on Valsume.

Hours—days—years seemed to pass as I watched the beginning of that frightful duel. The cobweb walls advanced and receded in choking billowy clouds as I watched; the violet light grew blindingly fierce—faded to utter blackness. Horrible fancies possessed me, and I saw Valsume's familiars leer and peep from behind those misted walls—heard obsence whispers, mutters, threats—felt the heat and stench.

And still those mortal enemies sat and looked into each other's souls. Still I waited—waited! And stretched on the floor of that arena lay the dog, and from its eyes the soul of Donald Harkness

looked out, and with me waited—waited —waited!

My sight was failing, and I blinked fiercely, summoning every energy, my cold fingers clutching the small vial which was the key of Donald's prison. My sight was failing—or—surely Valsume was getting paler, his look more dim and vacant.

Surely the clouded rapture of Burnham's eyes was hardening to something infinitely more piercing and compelling.

The dog too had noticed something; he lifted his nose from the floor, and for a moment the young imprisoned soul appealed to me. With all my strength I sent my wordless message back of hope and reassurance, while the dog's limp body stiffened and its head grew more erect.

Now I was sure that all was not well with Valsume. He had the appearance of someone paralyzed, who can neither move nor cry out, but who struggles desperately to do both.

Burnham's look was that of an avenging angel holding the gates of Paradise against Hell. The neophyte's vague rapture was transformed to a burning fiery glance, piercing as a rapier's flash.

Valsume's face grew ghastly; beads of sweat gathered and rolled down from his brow, trickling unheeded to his costly robes.

Ages, eons passed over my head as I watched with agonized impatience for the crisis of the unnatural combat. Life itself seemed over for me—I was a wandering thing among the stars and mist—waiting —and I had forgotten for what I was waiting—the clouds and mist around me were pierced with eyes—eyes—always eyes in the drifting gray mist.

My senses cleared again, and now Valsume knew the taste of fear at last. His mouth had sagged open, his eyes were filmy and vacant, his face as gray as the cobweb hangings of his room. Long convulsive shudders ran through his body.

And the dog—the dog knew that Valsume was in his extremity—the prisoner within that canine body was straining at his bonds.

Slow awful seconds dragged out until I was at the point of shrieking aloud with the agony of enduring their weight.

Time stopped—the whole of eternity paused to see the finish of the duel in that little room of cobwebs.

Ah—at last! The heavy lids fell—fluttered open—fell again—closed finally. Valsume's nerveless body slipped back and crumpled up in the throne-like seat.

Burnham's hand made a flashing gesture, and at the signal I leaped from my chair, drew the vial from my pocket and fell on my knees before the dog.

He knew—he knew! In a moment the burning draft from that deadly vial was down the beast's throat. One violent shudder as the swift merciful poison ran through the little body, and the dog lay dead at my feet.

"Ah! Be swift—swift, Don!" Burnham's voice was full of a great urgency.

Once more I felt the pressure of the hosts of hell—the gray mist swept blindingly about me. Through the choking vapor I saw the tall figure which had been Valsume rise up from his throne-like chair, stretching out both hands toward Burnham.

The latter looked deep in the eyes of that tall figure, took the hands in his own —his voice like a clarion-call:

"Donald! Donald!"

Then I saw the bird. It was moving, fluttering, beating its stiffened wings on the ground where it lay, in the effort to rise and fly!

I flung my handkerchief over it and gathered the little bundle in my two hands.

"Where—where?" I gasped.

Burnham took it from me—I loathed the feel of that fluttering thing between my fingers—and he went quickly to the outer room.

Donald and I were in time to see him close the door of the stove, behind which glowed a white, hot fire. Of handkerchief or bird there was no sign.

"The door is shut," said Burnham softly, his arm about the boy's shoulders.

Whether he referred to the stove, or to that other door between our world and that outer darkness, from which Valsume had emerged, I did not ask, then or at any other time.

ON Goonhilly Downs there is no longer that gray sinister patch of sand in the midst of the marsh.

The grave of Adrian Valsume is covered with tall reeds—grasses grow thick and green—and yellow rag-wort tosses in the sun and strong salt wind.

The Silver Curse of Yarlik

by V. K. KALEDIN

"Donga—donga donga-d-ong!"

WELL! they are dead now. The "Yank," short of temper and quick with his gun; Fritz, the beer-guzzling German; and Stass the Polish smuggler—soldiers of fortune, adventurers, men without a country like myself.

Fritz died fighting in the ranks of the Schenchi-Po-Ying, or "Augustly Divine Mechanism Army," as the Chinese call their foreign-drilled forces; Stass used the same alibi twice and faced a Polish firing-squad; and the "Yank" passed out listening to the chimes of a silver bell.

Peace to their ashes! I can now write this strange yarn, a warning to others of our ilk—soldiers of fortune, adventurers, men living in hell-holes of this world.

I suppose I should explain the reason why our unholy quartet found it highly profitable to play hide-and-seek behind the Polish-Bolshevist lines in the winter of 19——.

However, the old policy of keeping a close mouth still looks good to me, I am *that* shy.

The "Yank"—he had no other name—suddenly found out that the Bolshevist Soviet of the town of Zagrapoli in the Ukraine had no special liking for our dope-smuggling activities as well as our gun-running and importing false currency.

What with the daily raids on deserters, martial law and a bunch of other laws, we led a dog's life, sort of skipped between jail and gallows, just escaping both.

"You guys get a cart or something," Stass piped in a frightened voice, "and we'll beat it for the Polish frontier very f-fast."

We got that cart pronto. Fritz borrowed enough rifles and ammunition to start a man-sized revolution in Mexico; the "Yank" donated a case of rank *vodka* to gargle our dusty throats; Stass and I supplied what grub we could steal.

Most of the traveling had to be done by night; at dawn we dashed for cover, or used our rifles killing off a few sneaking forest guards.

The country swarmed with mounted renegade Cossack patrols; evidently the Soviets had their own ideas as to smugglers and deserters.

And there was the stench of a moving army, a peculiar stench hanging for hours in the frosty air like fumes of mustard gas.

The "Yank" sniffed and swore; he lashed the tired Kirghiz ponies until they bucked and squealed.

A tough specimen was the "Yank," nervy and mean, deadly with his gun and friendly with his huge hoarse laughs. His eyes were cold, gray and narrow; down-curving lips covered a row of perfect white teeth. He wore a drab-colored uniform with a single soiled military ribbon, the head covered with a *koubanka* of Astrakhan lamb. And he could use a knife; that lightning upward stroke of his gutted many a red-starred Cossack before the victim could squeak his last squeak.

Fritz the German was fat and strong; his thick neck mottled with angry blood at the sight of a wounded Bolshevist soldier crawling in front of our cart. Yes, he did that, snapped the poor devil's neck with his bare hands and toasted the *Vaterland*.

Stass the Polish smuggler was tall, dark and keen-eyed. Also he could stutter a Latin prayer or two between the stabbing reports of his heavy police automatic.

A fine gang we had, men that faced death as one faces a crushed worm.

AFTER a week of slow crawling over the shell-torn roads, we came to a Tatar settlement and here, though we were miles from the Polish frontier, were inquisitive border guards of the Bolshevists, as piously eager to keep doubtful citizens of Russia within gallows' reach at home as were the Poles to keep them out of their country.

The settlement was not much to look at from a painter's point of view. A couple of shacks and storehouses kept company, and nothing else was visible except the muddy plain with stumps of trees and a shaggy pony standing head down and rump to a whistling wind.

The "Yank" spoke first.

"Death-trap that, boys. Bet you they have a dozen machine-guns concealed in that barn."

"What do *you* think?" I asked Stass.

He glanced at the gray barn, then swept the place with his field-glasses.

"The 'Yank' is right, they have g-guns there, brother."

Fritz lumbered away humming *Deutschland Ueber Alles* under his breath, and cursing the mud.

We backed our cart into a gaping shell-hole and blindfolded the horses. A single neigh, or a frightened squeal, then what? Life was cheap in Russia, the machine-gun crews had no sense of humor. Not when they could crucify a woman and fill her with lead! and there she hung like a piece of raw meat which dangled from the flag-post half-way between the gray barn and the distant woods.

Fritz, returning from his reconnoitering, crawled crabwise into the shellhole, winked and let go a barrage of German profanity.

"Himmelkreuzgranatan Donnerwetter! Ja;" they had at least four machine-guns concealed in the upper story of the barn. Bracketed too. One burst would account for a squad of infantry. No sense in using the highway, the woods would afford some shelter. . . .

"Himmel!" Fritz jerked the words between spasms of a chronic beer cough; "the Yarlik monastery is there—oh hell! —right in the woods!"

Stass listened. His face lost the color of old bronze, his forehead puckered, his hands clutched at the amber cross hanging from his money belt.

The "Yank" noticed the familiar signs. "Out with it, Stass. What's the matter with that joint? C'mon, bozo, poppa wants to know."

Stass gave one agonized squeak. "H-haunted and just l-lousy with curses!"

I laughed—in spite of that piece of blue-red meat which dangled from the post.

The "Yank" measured the distance between the settlement and the neck of the woods.

" 'Minds me of old days in the regular army. S'pose we crawl to that clump of bushes. Yarlik, is it?—Land o' Goshen, look at that dumb Polack!"

Stass stood upright, sucking the frosty air in hungry, whistling gulps. His face was twisted into a bloodless mask, the eyes dimmed with a film of stark horror. His lips moved slowly, each guttural word choked down by bubbling froth.

"Yarlik . . . torture monastery . . . Bogardus . . . curse!"

For once the Polish smuggler resembled a wax doll, if only that doll could retch and beg for a drink.

THE velvet black shadows between the branches of gigantic oaks curled and danced before the lance shafts of a rising moon. We had been walking for something like an hour, shifting our heavy packs and cursing the dry twigs.

Now and then one would snap like a diminutive toy pistol, loud enough to be heard by a possible ambushed patrol.

"Yarlik! . . . torture monastery!"

Stass at last talked sense and only at the point of the "Yank's" revolver. . . . Here's the dope, in my words, not his.

Volga pirates four hundred years ago made a settlement on the Donga marshes, in the steppe country just beyond the forest. They traded with the Tatars of the hinterland, waged war on the Muscovite Tsars. After a while they brought out caravans from China—Cathay they called it — with silk, jade and animal hides. They opened up the old native mines, unworked since the times of Koubley Khan, and got out great quantities of minerals and rubies. Quantities of opals and other things.

Wandering Cossack clans and Tzigan tribes served the pirates—for a reason. Plunder which they shared. Torture too

—torture learned in Persia from the bald-headed executioners of the "Tower of Death."

The pirates made their own laws, and sneered at the throne of Muscovy.

Yarlik—the word means "Monastery-of-Torture-Unbearable"—grew from a log blockhouse to a walled and garrisoned fortress.

On each side of the entrance gate and up the stone walls, the pirates placed life-sized wood and bronze figures representing people undergoing tortures inflicted in the ten kingdoms of Moslem hell. There were some being bored through the temples, sawn between raw horse-hides, dried in sulfur coffins, pulled through a bed of rusty nails, boiled in pine tar, crushed by the slow descent of a red-hot anvil.

Bogardus, the leader—abbot, the pirates called him from his habit of wearing black sheepskins—once captured a Persian galley with gifts for John the Terrible, Tsar of Muscovy.

Among the priceless jewels was a silver bell of no great value, but with a peculiar harsh and penetrating sound.

Bogardus divided the spoils between his followers, keeping nothing for himself except the bell.

For months he kept to his cell, the door closely guarded by two giant deaf and dumb Chinese slaves. Then the bell began to ring, and heavily nailed coffins were carted away to be hurled into the slime of the Donga marshes.

In many lands and in many languages people spoke of the "Silver Curse of Yarlik"; the priests of all creeds called it a menace from the pits of hell.

One night—St. John's night it was—Bogardus did not call from his cell for his goblet of Greek wine. That startled his comrades. One bearded ruffian said it was an omen of death. It was. Bogardus was found in his throneroom, one hand closed over a half-written parchment. Strangled by no human hands.

Years later the Muscovite Boyards raided Yarlik, and after a long siege, slaughtered the pirates. They found no hidden treasures, nor did they find the bell of doom and the bones of Bogardus the Abbot.

"THE silver bell rings now, and ring it will, for a curse of curses has been laid on its ghostly peals." Stass bit his lip until it bled. His face twitched, and his hands closed over the amber cross he wore suspended from his money belt.

Legend stuff that? Perhaps! And perhaps not. How am I to tell? The fact remained that the crumbling ruins of Yarlik were shunned by both the Bolshevists and the Poles—a safe place for our gang.

We pushed on. The low baying of a lone wolf sounded like hoarse, meditative laughter, cruel in its calling notes.

The "Yank" shifted his heavy pack, swore softly.

"That hell-dog sure sounds nasty. Pipe down, Fritz; 'bout time you shut your kisser. Cripes! Listen to this, guys!"

The howl changed into a series of broken shrieks; then came the clear ring of a distant bell. It was not one of those deep-throated *ding-dong* bells; rather it was a *donga-donga-dong* bell, nothing less than an insistent, alarming, exciting gong, with a peculiar penetrating quality.

"Donga-donga-donga-donga-do-ong!" That ghostly bell rang, I would say, for the space of ten seconds. Then it abruptly stopped.

"Told you so—it's the s-silver bell!" Stass crossed himself fervently, spitting over his left shoulder.

Fritz, bending over to see better, pointed to a clearing not far distant from some fallen trees overgrown with prickly thorns.

Cold moonlight flooded the woods, one could see a brown squirrel jumping from branch to branch.

The "Yank" gritted his teeth; his hand shot out, pinning the blubbering Stass down to the ground.

There was some barbed wire stretched across the clearing, and on the wire half-naked corpses, greenish-blue under the merciless exposing rays.

Some were dangling face down, others with faces upturned and hands clutching at space just as they were caught by machine-gun fire, or a creeping barrage of low-bursting shrapnel.

A creature clad in long, loose sheepskins—black sheepskins—crawled from corpse to corpse, searching, pawing, laughing, gurgling.

Where the wire ended hung the corpse of a woman, long matted hair covering a swollen white throat.

"Donga-donga-donga-do-ong!"

The thing in black—ghost, vampire, man?—stretched out its long, thin arms, the black sheepskins forming two gigantic wings, bat wings flapping and challenging.

"Do-ong!" Hungry teeth fastened themselves into that throat, tearing, ripping, slashing. . . .

We ran blindly. Somewhere ahead of us the lone wolf howled in short, grunting howls. He had fed well.

YARLIK! The ruins of the torture monastery stood on a low hill on the side of which grew a few stately old oaks. The hill was like a colossal gopher mound on a level prairie. On all sides of it lay the gray, bleak and unproductive heath.

We unshouldered our packs, pumping the cold air into our bursting lungs.

Stass mumbled Latin prayers; the "Yank" fingered his Colt with a sneer on his curling lips.

"Swell place that, gang! I hope to kiss a caow we'll flop there, ghosts or no ghosts. C'mon, rookies, follow the sergeant!"

We did. Stass had to be dragged, he couldn't walk a step.

Now I know very little about ruins, that is to say, historical ruins, but even a fool could make a fair guess that they spelt safety. And why not?

One huge, rough tower, or what was left of it, pointed an accusing finger at the weird moonlight. There were other smaller towers, blackened and crumbling, and the citadel commanding the ruins of a bridge over an invisible moat.

We chose the main tower, groped our way down some stairs, slowly, carefully, the steps worn slippery and hollow as by the tread of hundreds of heavily booted feet, down, always down. There was a feeble ray of moonlight through the cracks in the masonry; the air was heavy, terribly oppressive, dank. We held our course, carefully setting our feet, hands stretched out at right angles from our bodies to give warning of unfamiliar objects, and finally landed dead against a slimy wall. Something rustled faintly like the patter of tiny feet, more like the scraping of a knife against a stone. Then came the bell, "donga-donga-do-ong," carrying with it the taint of death, the flavor of dread tortures which surrounded the place like a miasmic haze.

Up flared our candle with a brutal orange flare.

Fritz pawed the wall with a shaking hand. There was no door—nothing except——

"Lookit, gang!" said the "Yank" and pointed at a niche in the wall from where protruded a rusty iron handle.

"What now?" I asked.

"Got to try the 'andle, that's what," the "Yank" answered, spitting on his hands.

A jerk and twist, more jerks and savage oaths—and suddenly half the wall slid to one side, sending down a shower of small pebbles.

A room, empty and yet not empty. I am not what they call psychic, yet I know the sensation of a prickling scalp.

Don't ask me why! All I can say is that even the "Yank" felt ill at ease as he bullied the whimpering Stass.

Fritz found some more candles in his pack, and grunted something in German as he stuck the bits of light into a crevice in the wall.

"Hell of a nice place, this here Yarlik!" the "Yank" said, indulging in one of his booming laughs. "Ain't no sign of a Russky ghost."

"No-o—but he wa-watches!" Stass stuttered the words, covering his pea-green face with a moist palm.

That's that. We ate, gulping the dry meat and crunching month-old barley cakes.

"Donga-donga-do-ong!" Faint now, as if muffled by some unseen guiding hand. "Do-ong!" Silence.

Fritz yawned and stretched full length on a pile of rocks. That German *knecht* had a shark skin; he could sleep on a torture rack. Stass glued his lips to a *vodka* bottle, mumbled some special prayers and curled up beside the snoring German.

Minutes passed. The "Yank" tapped me on the shoulder, dug in his fingers until I winced with pain.

A saraband of purple shadows brought into stark relief another shadow—grotesque, monstrous, unhuman—gigantic bat wings spread and threatening.

A nauseating stench of putrid flesh filled the room, the candles spluttered and went out.

"Donga - donga - donga - do - ong!" Through the walls of the room, all around in the air, we heard that same strident, terrible peal. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

The "Yank" lighted the candles. His voice was just a shade too low to inspire courage.

"S'pose we find that bell—it's driving me nuts!"

I nodded silently. No use squeaking—that's the word, squeaking—when you want to show you're game.

"Donga-do-ong!" There it went again, tolling our fate, mocking our courage.

The "Yank" fingered his Colt with that simple touch which denotes a long military career. Ready now.

WE CRAWLED through a narrow airshaft, walked down another flight of stairs, turned and twisted until we found an iron door fastened by a rusty padlock.

Twin reports shattered the awful silence; the lock snapped under the impacts of steel-nosed bullets.

Perhaps the whole sensation, the whole flash of emotions, lasted only a moment. Perhaps it was contained in the fraction of a second it took us to open *that* door.

Another room—a throneroom. . . .

"Gawd!"

And yet the thing which stirred the "Yank's" profanity was only a face—that of an old man. It was wrinkled, greenish-yellow, immobile on a scrawny neck which was like the dried stalk of some poisonous nightmare flower. The body, arms and legs wrapped in moldy black sheepskins was enthroned on a great chair of carved teakwood.

A hard face to picture, to describe, as I saw it there suddenly when our candles brought it into stark relief. The face of a plague-spotted Muscovite beggar, blended with the inhuman, meditating crushing calm of a Chinese sage—heavy-

jowled, thin-lipped, the yellow teeth protruding through the worm-eaten skin—Bogardus the Abbot slept.

"Donga-do-ong!" The "Yank" went mad.

His fist crushed into the leering face with the force of a sledgehammer.

From between the staring ribs and the grinning teeth came a spurt of choking dust; then the thing crumpled on the floor—moldy sheepskins and yellow bones.

Crash! the teakwood chair was flung aside, revealing a gaping manhole filled with clammy, fetid vapor.

"C'mon!" The single word was not a command, but rather an appeal to my courage.

We found a long iron ladder running into the depths of that sinister hole—a death-trap or worse?

The silver bell rang furiously, each peal the grim, sardonic laughter of fate unknown.

Down, down, down.

It was only human that my scalp prickled with bursting beads of sweat as I walked through another iron door into a hall, very high, with a vaulted ceiling. Up to a height of seven feet the walls were covered with stucco, white on white ivory very skilfully blended with shiny white lac.

Three heavy oak chests stood in a corner of the hall, and they were guarded.

Ten giant skeletons, gilded and lacquered, held ten rusty swords in their bony hands—a silent watch over the treasures of Bogardus the Abbot.

"Do-ong!" Suspended by an iron chain from a projecting beam hung the silver bell, its sides ornamented with two milk-jade toads repulsive in their very beauty.

The Silver Curse of Yarlik!

A gust of hot air from some unseen ventilation-shaft swept the hall, making the bell resume its maddening toll.

"Damn you!"

The "Yank" climbed the steps of a bronze scaffold; his hand seized the clapper of the bell, pulled, tugged in a frenzy of brutal strength.

Two hooked blades shot out from the mouths of the toads, catching the unfortunate man just behind the ears, piercing, boring, slashing, fastening tighter and tighter until the limp body swung suspended by the iron chain.

"Donga-donga-donga-d-ong!" The dripping scarlet clapper sent its silver curses into the dead silence of the treasure room.

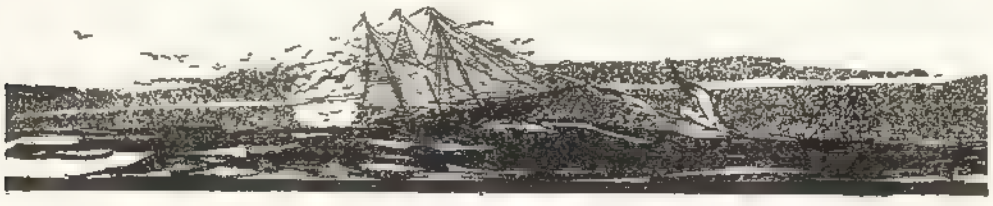
THE doctor in a Polish field hospital, of which I was an inmate for several months, told but half the truth.

Sure enough he withheld something, fearing it might send my brain into the realm of insanity.

And *that* something I learned from the head nurse, a kindly old soul and a general nuisance.

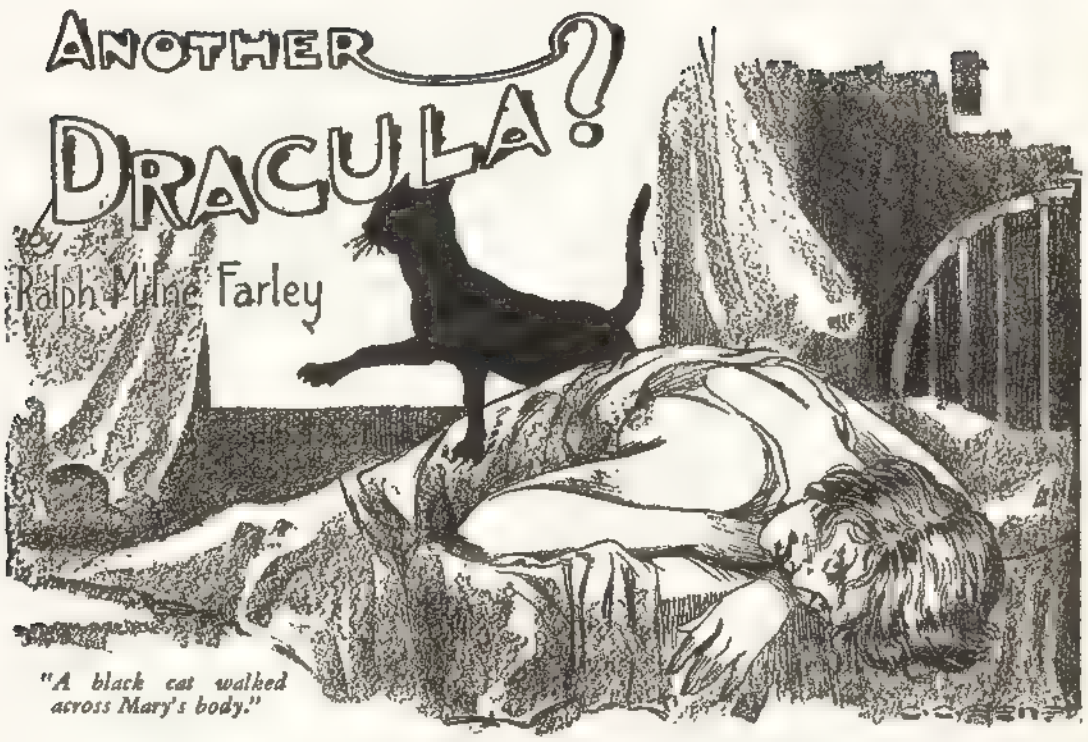
A squad of Polish sappers engaged in dynamiting the ruins of Yarlik found the "Yank's" body swinging from a gory chain.

His face was covered with a mantle of sheepskins. And they were black sheepskins—*black and moldy.*



ANOTHER DRACULA?

by Ralph Milne Farley



"A black cat walked across Mary's body."

The Story Thus Far

THE town of Yankton is startled by the appearance of a Frenchman, called Peter Larousse, who is only seen at night, and remains hidden during the daytime. He claims that this is because he is afflicted with a tropical skin disease that will not bear the ultra-violet rays of daylight; but the people of Yankton think that it is because he is a vampire, another Dracula, who lies during the day in the coffin which he has had buried in the Wilson lot. Mary Morton, fiancee of Herman Fulton, the banker, dies, supposedly of anemia, and is buried in the cemetery just as Dr. Crane thinks he has found how to cure her anemia. She, or her ghost, appears to Dr. Crane in his New York apartment, tells him she has been buried, and asks his help. Then she disappears. Dr. Crane takes the first train to Yankton, arriving as the inhabitants are about to dig up Mary's grave and stake her for a vampire.

8. In the Grave

"WELL, sir, you've come!" exclaimed Dan Callahan, as Dr. Crane swung off the Limited late that night. "I got your wire, and here I am, although pretty near every other man in town is up at the cemetery. But not any of the women; for it's no fit work for a woman."

"What isn't?" asked the young doctor, with ominous foreboding.

"The gang is digging up Mary Morton's body."

"To save her life?" asked Crane, eagerly.

"Save her life? Naw!" replied Dan. "She's dead. But she's been haunting people all over town since she died, and so some of the men have got it figured out that she's turned vampire."

"She's turned what?" exclaimed Crane, astonished.

"Vampire," explained the taxi-driver. "Not the movie kind, but the spook kind, that flies around at night and sucks blood. Herman Fulton has been reading up a lot about them in the Carnegie Library, and it seems like there really is such a thing. They reckon that that old Frenchman, Mussoo Larousse, is one too, and that his coming here had something to do with poor Mary dying and turning into one. He's been laying low ever since Mary died. But the gang is out to get them both. It says in the book, which Herman was reading, that the only way

to cure a vampire is to cut off its head and stuff its mouth full of onions."

"Just a minute," interrupted the young doctor, horrified; "you don't mean to say that's what they're planning to do to Mary!"

"Why not?" replied Dan. "She's dead, ain't she? And besides, she really has been haunting people."

"Dan," said Crane solemnly, seizing him by the shoulders, and staring into his eyes, "I don't believe that Mary is dead at all. I believe that she's merely in a cataleptic trance——"

"Speaking of cats," interrupted the Irishman, "that's another thing. A black cat walked across Mary's body just before she died, and hasn't been seen since; and they say that that's a sure sign that both she and the cat have turned into vampires."

"What a beastly lot of rot!" exclaimed Dr. Crane, indignantly. "It's nothing but absurd superstition! There's a very good chance that Mary is still alive, and that all this so-called 'haunting' is merely due to her efforts to communicate with her friends and loved ones, and get them to rescue her. Whereupon they go and dig her up, not to save her life, but rather to kill her. My God, while we're wasting time talking here, they may be doing it already! Come on. Are you game to help me stop them?"

"That I am!" replied Dan fervently. "You saved little Danny's life, and I'm with you in anything this side of hell. Let's go."

"Have you any guns?"

"One automatic pistol in my cab, and another at the garage."

"Let's get them, then, and let's hurry. I have a revolver in my grip here."

Soon the two allies, fully armed, were speeding over the mile of road which led from the village to the cemetery. They found the burial-place crowded with men. Cars were parked all around.

Leaving the taxicab as near to the graveyard as they could get, they hurried forward with flashlights in hand, and weapons as yet concealed.

"Thank God!" breathed Dr. Crane, for the digging was still in progress.

No one paid them any attention as they joined the milling throng. Many of the men carried lanterns, which they held high around Mary Morton's grave, while others took short turns with a spade. Little brown bats fluttered about in pursuit of the insects which the lanterns attracted.

It was evident that the digging had only just started. And every one was so excited that the hole did not make very rapid progress.

Dan Callahan had exaggerated. There were but few of Yankton's leading citizens present. Most of the mob consisted of coal-miners and others of the lower strata of the community. But there were enough of the higher strata present to make the gathering quite representative. In fact, a survey of the crowd would give a pretty good idea as to just what promissory notes, held by Herman Fulton's bank, were badly overdue.

Herman himself was in charge of operations. He fretted and fumed and scolded and interfered, none of which helped particularly to speed up the work.

Dr. Crane remarked in an undertone to the taxi-driver, "We might just as well let *them* do the digging for us. Then we can step in at the last moment, and do the rescuing ourselves."

So the two lay low, remained inconspicuously on the outskirts of the crowd, and waited.

FINALLY, well toward morning, the crunching of the shovel changed to a wooden thumping. Every one heaved a sigh of relief. Their flagging interest

revived. Presently the man in the hole passed up the lid of the box which contained the coffin.

"Now to open the coffin," said he.

"No you don't!" some one shouted. "Haul it up, and give us all a look."

"Yes, yes," chorused the crowd. "Haul it up. Give us a look."

So ropes were attached to the handles, and the coffin was hoisted onto the ground beside the grave.

Herman Fulton bustled authoritatively forward.

"Undertaker here?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," a voice replied.

"Got your keys handy?"

"Yes, sir, but we haven't any permit from the Board of Health."

"You should have thought of that earlier in the evening. The clerk will backdate a permit tomorrow, if I ask him to. A public duty, like what we are doing tonight, can't wait on any formalities."

"Yes, sir."

And the undertaker stepped forward and unlocked the coffin. Herman started to raise the lid, and then hesitated. Dr. Crane and Dan Callahan gripped their pistols tighter, and surged forward with the crowd that pressed expectantly in from all sides.

Herman said, "Now don't be surprized if the coffin is empty, for she may be off right now on one of her vampiring trips. If so, we'll just have to wait until she returns, which she's sure to do before morning. I've been reading up a lot on the subject, and I've found out that vampires must always come back to their coffins before sunrise."

So saying, he flung up the lid. But the coffin was not vacant. There lay the body of Mary Morton, just as when the coffin had been closed several weeks before. No ravages of decay were in evidence. A delicate pink bloom lay on her cheeks. Her lips were red. She looked almost like her old-time self of before her illness.

The crowd gasped in unison. Then some one exclaimed, "She looks alive!"

"Why wouldn't she?" muttered the undertaker under his breath. "I rouged her up good for the funeral."

"Is she really dead?" asked some one.

"No," replied Herman Fulton authoritatively. "Haven't I explained it to all of you again and again? She is what the books call 'undead.' She is a vampire. This Larousse person is one, too. Vampires go on living after they die. They sneak out of their graves at night, to haunt people and to suck people's blood. And when their victims finally die, the victims become vampires in turn. Larousse sucked Mary's blood until she died and joined his band of devils. She is now haunting several of us, though she doesn't seem to have bitten any of us yet. If we don't free her, we'll become vampires when we die, and so on. It's a vicious circle. It's—it's like one of those chain-letters: once it gets well started, there's no telling where it will end up. We've got to stop it right now—nip it in the bud, as it were."

He spoke his piece like some patent-medicine faker getting off a line of patter.

But Pop Morton blurted out, "I dunno, Herman. I've heard all your arguments again and again. But it's contrary to nature for me to let you mutilate my daughter's body. Sacrilegious, too, after she's been given a Christian burial."

"Mr. Morton," said Herman sternly, "your daughter herself will be grateful. Her poor spirit doesn't enjoy being a vampire. It longs for rest. We must cut off her head, drive a stake through her heart, and fill her mouth with garlic. Then you will see a look of peace descend upon her sad face, as her spirit is released from its thraldom, and returns to God who gave it."

"Her face do look sad," interjected some one.

"No wonder," muttered Dr. Crane under his breath.

Herman Fulton continued sententiously, "I was her fiancé, and so it is my right and duty to strike the blow that sets her free. I hate to mutilate the beautiful body of her whom I loved. But I know that it would be her own wish to have it so. In a few moments she shall be freed from the devil. And then we shall dig up that devil himself, over in the Wilson lot, and free him, too, though not for any love, in his case, but rather merely that his evil career may be put to an end. Mr. Morton, in a few moments, loving hands will send your daughter's soul to peace."

Herman Fulton drew a long hunting-knife from his belt.

"Stop!" shouted a voice in the crowd.

Every one looked around, some holding their lanterns aloft and shading them to see who had caused the disturbance. They looked into the drawn revolvers of Ralph Crane and Dan Callahan.

"Stand back there from that coffin! Quick! All of you!" commanded the young doctor, clipping his words off peremptorily.

The crowd recoiled immediately and instinctively.

But Herman sneered, "So it's little sawbones come back for his sweetie! Do you want to claim for yourself the right to save her soul?"

"I claim the right to save her *life,*" replied Crane tersely.

"Any more wise-cracks out of you, Herman Fulton," added Dan, "and they'll be your last remarks this side of hell."

Herman glowered, started to say something, then thought better of it, and remained silent.

Dr. Crane continued, "You've all been listening to the most arrant lot of bosh and mediæval superstition. Mary Morton isn't dead, she's merely in a cataleptic trance. If you idiots will keep out of the way for a few moments, I can resuscitate her, and prove it to you."

"No you don't," asserted Herman Fulton. "We've got to act quick. The first thing you know, she'll vanish in a shower of sparks, or a black mist, or turn into a bat or something, and make her escape. We're wasting time talking."

"Yeah?" remarked some one from the crowd. "Well, you said yourself that she'd have to come back at sunrise. So what's the difference? Let's give the Doc a chance."

"Yes, let's," echoed several others.

Herman was nonplussed for a moment. But then, remembering that he was the banker who held most of their financial lives in the hollow of his hand, he recovered his poise. He stared imperiously round at his followers. One by one, as his glance fell upon them, they remembered some mortgage, or note, or overdrawn account, and their incipient opposition crumbled.

The crowd was angry and chagrined at Herman's power over them, but they dared not vent their anger upon him, and so they looked around for a vicarious victim, and finally centered on Dr. Crane. The mob began to murmur.

The doctor sensed their growing unrest, and realized that they were rapidly working themselves into a fanatical condition, in which they would attack him and Dan, in spite of the automatics. This would mean shooting to kill. Dr. Crane had no desire to kill any one, and besides he wanted to be sure and save Mary Morton. Oh, if there were at least two men in the crowd whom he could trust to hold his revolver and one of Dan's while he himself tried to bring Mary back to life!

"What's the disturbance?" asked a quiet voice behind him.

THE answer was an angry snarl from the mob, as Monsieur Larousse, in his inevitable cape-coat, stepped to the side of Dan and the doctor.

"It's the old devil himself," snarled Herman Fulton.

"That remark appears to be addressed to me," said Larousse with imperturbable suavity. "Will some one please explain."

"You don't need any explanation, you old vampire," blurted out Herman. "You know yourself that you are one of the undead. You sucked the blood of Mary Morton, and made a vampire out of her, too. So we've dug up her body, and are going to drive a stake through her heart, to lay her ghost. The night is nearly over, and then when you return to your own coffin with the morning light, we'll drive a stake through you, too."

"I take it, sir," said Larousse, ignoring Herman and addressing Dr. Crane, "that you are not in the least impressed by this tommyrot and poppycock. You and the taxi-man here appear to be opposing these gentlemen. You look sensible. Is there anything that I can do to assist in preventing this sacrilege? Little Mary Morton was a dear sweet girl, whom I greatly admired."

"We know you did," sneered Herman Fulton.

Dr. Crane felt a bit uneasy at having this suspected Dracula-person for an ally. But it was a case of any port in a storm.

"We have three guns," said he. "If I can get two sane individuals to help me, Dan and they can hold back the mob, while I have an opportunity to bring Mary out of her trance."

"Doctor," said Pop Morton, stepping forward, "I'll take one of the guns. You're a doctor, and you ought to know what you're about."

With a sigh of relief, Crane handed over his pistol. But instantly a crafty smile played across the features of Pop Morton.

"Stick 'em up!" he shouted. "Crane, Larousse, Callahan! Let go your gun, Callahan!"

He had the drop on them all, even on Dan, who promptly let go the one gun which he held. His other automatic was in his pocket.

"Now do your dirty work, Herman," exclaimed Pop, rather pleased to be usurping Fulton's center of the stage. "Quick, while I hold off these interferers."

9. *The Tables Turned*

BUT, even as Pop Morton spoke, a gray arm was suddenly swung around his neck from behind, while at the same instant the other hand of his assailant seized his right wrist and elevated the muzzle of the gun. Dr. Crane leaped forward and snatched away the weapon.

Meanwhile, however, Herman Fulton, taking advantage of the diversion, had sneaked up to the coffin, with drawn hunting-knife, which he now held poised aloft over Mary's breast.

"No you don't!" sang out Dan Callahan, whipping out his other gun. "Back from that coffin, you dirty rat."

Herman quickly obeyed.

Monsieur Larousse addressed the man who was holding Pop Morton. "Ah, Higgins, you arrived just in time."

The newcomer was his gray-uniformed chauffeur.

"Now, doctor," announced Larousse, with a grin which revealed his white fangs, "you have the two sane men for whom you wished, namely, myself and Higgins. And I have a little pistol of my

own, so you are still one gun ahead. I suggest that you proceed with the resuscitation at once, before some one else tries to stop you. That old fool of a storekeeper nearly succeeded, you know."

So saying, Larousse pulled out a pearl-handled thirty-two, and his chauffeur picked up the gat which Dan Callahan had dropped. Four well-armed and resolute men now surrounded the coffin and held the crowd at bay.

Herman Fulton felt his prestige rapidly evaporating. Something must be done to retrieve the situation!

"Just a minute," he remonstrated, holding up his hand. "Let's talk this thing out, like reasoning human beings. You don't look at all at ease in your own mind, Dr. Crane, at having Dracula for an ally, so—"

"Dracula?" cut in Larousse. "So *that's* what you've been reading! Bram Stoker, who wrote that infernal book as a mere bit of fiction, has a great deal of innocent blood on his head. I wonder how many superstitious mobs in back-woods communities have dug up the bodies of cataleptic sufferers and spiked their innocent lives away, since that damnable novel was written, instead of digging them up and resuscitating them!

"I speak with feeling," he added. "For some of the men in my club in Paris used to taunt me with the nick-name 'Dracula', because of my supposed resemblance to the hero—or rather, villain—of that story."

"But you *are* a vampire, aren't you?" objected Herman.

"Certainly not!" replied the old man, a bit testily at last.

"Then who is buried in that coffin over in the Wilson lot, if it isn't yourself?"

"My father," said Larousse with a touch of reverence in his voice.

"And who was your father?"

"Tom Wilson. Did any one here know him?"

There was a murmur of surprized assent from some of the older men, one of whom added the information, "When Tommy was just a boy, he was run out of town for robbing the till at the feed store."

"It's a lie!" shouted Larousse, his red eyes blazing in the lantern light. "My father never robbed that till! He was falsely accused, and had to flee or go to jail. So he ran away to sea, and changed his name to Larousse—took the name of his ship captain. Finally he ended up in Paris, established a trading firm there, became very rich, and married. I was his only son. He had me educated at British and American universities. When he died — my mother having predeceased him—he left me his fortune, contingent on my burying him in his old home town, which he seemed to love in spite of the unfair way in which it had treated him — I don't know why I am telling you all this, for it certainly is none of your concern."

Herman Fulton exclaimed under his breath, "It's the gift of the gods! If we can keep that old bird talking until sunrise, we'll have him at our mercy." So he asked aloud, "But you don't live anywhere, and you come out only at night. Where do you sleep in the daytime, if not in that coffin?"

"As to my coming out only at night, it is because I suffer from tropical dermatitis——"

"I can vouch for that," interjected Dr. Crane. "Tropical dermatitis is curable only if the sufferer keeps away from the ultra-violet rays of sunlight."

"Aw, who cares for what the Doc says?" snorted some one in the crowd. "He's in cahoots with Dracula, anyhow!"

"*I* care," announced the calm voice of old Dr. Porter. "I know about that dis-

ease. If this gentleman has it, he is certainly wise to keep out of the sunlight. And, Dr. Crane, I wouldn't be surprized if you were right about Mary, too. Give me your revolver, and I'll help guard the body, on my professional word of honor."

10. *The Showdown*

THE younger doctor handed over his gun without an instant's hesitation, and started to work on the unconscious form of Mary Morton, while Dr. Porter, Larousse, Higgins and Dan Callahan guarded the coffin on four sides.

"You're licked, Herman!" asserted Dan triumphantly.

"Not yet," muttered Fulton to himself, then aloud, "We are willing to listen to your explanations, Mr. Wilson, or Larousse, or whatever your name is. You have stated that some strange disease has made a night-prowler out of you. But where do you hole-up in the daytime? Answer me that."

"Very simple," replied the foreigner imperturbably. "I stay with Miss Harriet Wilson, the old lady whom you call 'Aunt Hattie;' and she really *is* my aunt, a much younger sister of my father."

The station agent now took a hand in the conversation.

"How do you explain all them little bats that hung around your coffin, the night we moved it for you?" he asked.

"Doubtless attracted by some of the embalming spices."

"And that *large* bat?"

"I didn't see any large bat."

"*You* wouldn't," exclaimed the station agent triumphantly, "for he was you yourself. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Any further questions?" inquired Larousse, ignoring this sally.

"Yes," replied Herman Fulton, returning to the fray. "Where have you been hiding ever since Mary Morton died?"

"Not that it's any concern of yours, but I happen to have been in Philadelphia, arranging for a fitting headstone for my father's grave," explained the gentleman.

"That's right," asserted the station agent; "for, come to think of it, the waybills for a headstone come in today. That is they come in yesterday, for I suppose today is tomorrow by now."

A few red streaks began to show in the eastern sky. Larousse at once became visibly agitated.

"Really, doctor," he said. "I hate to desert you at such a time. The dermatitis, you know. I must hurry away before it gets light. Here, take my revolver. You can keep it, and you can keep Higgins too, as long as you need them. I'd do anything for the sake of little Mary—except risk my damnable health."

"I know," sighed Dr. Crane, looking up from his work, and accepting the proffered firearm.

"And *we* know, too," sneered Herman Fulton. "Follow him to the Wilson lot, some of you men, and watch him ooze into the grave with the first beams of the rising sun."

"I think it would be safer, sir, for you to take your revolver with you," asserted Dr. Crane, handing back the pearl-handled thirty-two. "When daylight comes, I am sure that Dr. Porter and Dan and Higgins will be able to handle this bunch of fat-heads. Good-bye, and God bless you. I thank you for your help this night."

"Good-bye," replied Larousse. "Higgins will bring me word of the little lady. Good-bye, you swine. You *chameaux!*"

It was the supreme French insult. Wrapping his cloak about him, he strode majestically away.

"To the Wilson lot! Follow him!" shouted Herman Fulton.

But that was not the path which the tall

stranger took. Instead he walked resolutely down toward the road.

"Follow him!" shrieked Herman, "Don't let him make his getaway! My God! Here we are trying to rid the world of a menace, and a nosy young doctor has to interfere and spoil it all. Come on. Never mind Mary. We must capture Dracula himself before he escapes us."

Whereupon he and the whole crowd, with the fickleness characteristic of mobs, rushed headlong after the retreating figure.

"The master needs me!" exclaimed Higgins, and followed in the wake of the mob.

"You go too, Dan," urged Ralph Crane. "Dr. Porter and I will be safe here, until those lynchers return."

So Dan Callahan hurried after Higgins.

As the crowd neared Larousse, those in the lead picked up stones and began to throw them. One stone grazed the cloaked figure, now clearly discernible in the gray morning light. Instantly Larousse wheeled and faced his tormentors.

"None of that!" he shouted. "I am a crack shot. I don't wish to fire at you, but I shall certainly do it if you make it necessary."

"Arrr," howled the mob, and let fly a shower of stones, several of which hit him squarely.

But he stood his ground. Instead of giving way, he raised his pearl-handled revolver and pointed it steadily at them.

"Aw, what do we care for toy pistols," shouted one of the men, raising a stone aloft and preparing to hurl it.

"Crack!" went the tall stranger's little weapon. The stone clattered to the ground, as the man who had been about to hurl it clapped his left hand to his right wrist, from which the blood was spurting.

"I warned you that I was a crack shot," repeated Larousse levelly, "and I meant it. Raise another stone against me, and I swear I shall shoot to kill."

Contemptuously he turned his back on them, and resumed his march to the road.

From a safe position in the rear of the mob, Herman Fulton urged, "Don't let him get away! Throw a lot of rocks quick, before he can turn!"

Something hard and small and cylindrical poked Herman suddenly in the ribs from behind, and Dan Callahan's voice spoke in his ear, "Quick! Tell them *not* to throw any rocks."

Herman did so, promptly, in a trembling voice. Higgins dashed through the crowd to his master's side.

Said Herman, "You'll be sorry for this, Callahan. No one ever bucks me in this town, and gets away with it. The mortgage on your garage is overdue."

"Forget it!" exclaimed Dan jovially. "When this gang finds out that you've made monkeys out of them tonight, I guess you won't be foreclosing any mortgages around here for quite a while. You may *control* a majority of the stock in the bank, but you don't *own* it. And Dr. Porter, your largest stockholder, is on *our* side now. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Oh, Dan," wailed Herman, "can't you see what you're doing? We're trying to rid the world of a menace, and you and that half-witted doctor——"

The revolver bored dangerously into his ribs.

"One more wise-crack out of you, you skunk," announced Dan, "and I'll be making the world safe for mortgages."

Meanwhile Larousse and his chauffeur Higgins had reached their parked car, closely followed by the threatening mob. Then, while Higgins stood them off, his employer climbed into the driver's seat, and started down the road, Higgins jump-

ing to the running-board as he departed.

Herman Fulton was about to wail again, but a sharp jab in the ribs from Callahan's revolver kept him quiet.

Several others of the mob, however, hastened to their own cars, and soon were off down the road in pursuit of Larousse. It was now daylight, with the rim of the sun just showing above the tops of the eastern hills.

"Back to Mary's grave!" shouted some one, whereupon the rest of the mob wheeled, and started back across the cemetery.

"None of that!" shouted Callahan, standing in their path with levelled revolver.

The spirit of the mob collapsed. They gazed sheepishly at each other. It was daylight now, broad daylight. The anonymity of the night was at an end. The darkness had covered them like the mask and robe of the Ku Klux, but now they stood exposed and undisguised.

IT ISN'T exactly a dignified performance for a lot of leading businessmen, and church elders, and bank directors, and coal miners, and what-not, of a conservative Republican community, however benighted and backwoodsy it may be, to dig up a body in a churchyard in the dead of night. And being caught still at it in broad daylight is even worse. They were ashamed of themselves and of each other.

In the midst of their confusion, young Dr. Crane and old Dr. Porter, standing by the coffin, beckoned to them, and then advanced to meet them, Crane holding his revolver again.

"She is alive," announced the older man, "but she is very weak. At present she is asleep. We must carry her back to town at once, and have a blood-transfusion."

"She called your name, Herman," added Dr. Crane, grimly. "It was the first thing she said when she came to."

Herman appeared visibly shaken at this announcement. Also his faith in the weird ideas gleaned from his reading was somewhat shaken as well.

"I'll call a truce," said he. "It's now daylight. The vampire, if she *is* a vampire, is at our mercy until sunset. We can lose nothing by giving in temporarily to the two doctors."

"If my daughter is really alive," began Pop Morton emphatically. And then suddenly he remembered the mortgage on his stock of goods, and became quiet again.

Ralph Crane replied to Herman Fulton's offer. Said he, toying with his gun, "We accept your truce, but with reservations. We are armed and we intend to stay armed until we see this thing through. We've been handed treachery before by you folks, and so we are taking no chances. Mary is very weak; she must be moved immediately, but quietly. The coffin and the hearse—gruesome as it sounds—will be the best way to move her. So I want six —ah—*un*-pallbearers, one might say," he laughed grimly, "to assist. Fulton and Morton—the job will keep you two out of mischief — Crocker, Warren, Crosby and Banks." He named the last four at random. "The rest of you lunatics keep out of the way, and heaven help you if you interfere. Come on, you six, and the undertaker."

So saying, he led the way back to the grave. It was a nerve-racking experience for the six "un-pallbearers." They had served at funerals before, all of them, and had thought nothing of it; had even jested, sedately, on such occasions, across the body. But never before had they spent an entire night in exhuming a corpse, only to carry it back to town with them—either alive or "undead"—whichever it was—in the morning.

It seemed for all the world, as though their actions were actually being run backward, like a trick motion-picture film. But it was their dread of ridicule that worried them, rather than any dread of the supernatural. Broad daylight had arrived, and their antics of the preceding night now seemed preposterous to them. They felt uneasy and conspicuous.

These men, who had been game to dig up a poor girl's body, drive a stake through her heart, cut off her head, and stuff her mouth full of garlic, now balked at the mere task of carrying her back to life again! But they had no choice in the matter. Dr. Crane and his supporters held the revolvers.

Without mishap, they got the coffin onto the hearse, which happened to be there merely because it was the undertaker's only means of personal conveyance. The rest of the mob rapidly and sheepishly disintegrated, all except Herman Fulton and one or two others, whose mortgages were the most hopelessly overdue.

Just as they were about to start for town, an automobile drew up, driven by one of the men who had pursued "Dracula."

He reported to Herman, "We followed the old boy to Aunt Hattie's cottage. By the time we got there, he was inside, and his chauffeur was on guard at the door with a gat in his hand. Our crowd just plain got cold feet, and went home. So I came back to report to you."

"But are you sure that Dracula is still inside Aunt Hattie's house?" asked Herman Fulton eagerly.

11. *A New Victim*

"N-NO," admitted the other, "but he must be, for his chauffeur and his car are there."

"Then he probably has a coffin at the cottage, as well as in the grave in the Wilson lot," asserted Herman positively; "for vampires always have to sleep in coffins in the daytime. Well, he's safe for the present. Let's get Mary's body back to town, and see how *that* turns out. Then we can tend to the old boy later in the day."

His mind still failed to grasp the fact that his little lynching-bee was over, at least for the present.

So the hearse started toward town. Dan Callahan, with drawn revolver, sat on the seat beside the undertaker. The two doctors rode in the rear with the coffin, Crane still holding his revolver. Herman Fulton followed in his own car at a safe distance. Also the six un-pallbearers.

The return to town was uneventful, and in a few minutes the hearse drew up at the Morton residence. The un-pallbearers came forward, the coffin was carried in, and the pale sleeping form of Mary Morton was lifted out and transferred to her bed. She was pale now because at the grave the two doctors had washed off her rouge, so as to be able to observe her true color.

Then Dr. Porter got the village nurse on the phone, she arrived with a lot of paraphernalia, and preparations were made for an immediate blood-transfusion.

Dr. Crane, Pop Morton and Dan Callahan were each tested as a possible donor, but their bloods all gave the wrong reaction.

"Herman," announced old Dr. Porter, "you are elected for the next test."

Herman Fulton turned pale.

"But I read in that book," he stammered, "that an interchange of blood with a vampire will tie a person to the vampire forever. Oh, Dr. Porter, please don't! If I give Mary some of my blood, and then she dies, it will mean that I must look forward all my life to being a vampire myself when I finally die!"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Dr. Porter, impatiently.

"Can't you use a salt and glucose solution?" Herman persisted. "I've read somewhere that it's just as good as real blood for transfusions."

"You read altogether too much!" snorted the old doctor. "Saline solution is no good in anemia. What she needs is red blood corpuscles, and she needs them in a hurry."

"The trouble with Herman is that he's a highbrow," added Dan. "He's educated beyond his intelligence."

"Herman," said Pop Morton levelly, "you are engaged to my daughter. Didn't you say something, up at the grave, about your having the first right to save her? Well, now's your chance, and if you don't take it, the engagement is off, mortgage or no mortgage!"

During Pop's remarks, Fulton had been getting all ready to mention the mortgage, but now Pop had got in ahead of him. Fulton squirmed visibly.

"Well," said he finally, "go ahead and make the test. Maybe *my* blood won't be the right kind either."

But, alas for Herman, his blood turned out to be in exactly the same class as Mary's. He paled again.

"It's murder!" he screamed. "It's worse than murder!"

But his captors were inexorable. While Dr. Crane held a pistol to his head Dan Callahan, grinning broadly, forced him into a chair and strapped him down.

"There's one comfort, Herman," said Dan: "if you turn into a vampire when you die it will give me great pleasure to drive a stake through your filthy heart, and cut off your head, and stuff your mouth full of vegetables. Then think how happy you'll be! I believe you yourself got off some such pious sentiment about little Mary. We want you to be happy, Herman dear, the same as you wanted Mary to be."

"This is no joking matter," Fulton blubbered.

"Now, now, Herman," soothed the Irishman, "shall we gag you, or will you keep quiet?"

"Don't gag him," objected Dr. Crane. "It might startle Mary. In fact we'd better even untie him. You stand out of Mary's sight, Dan, and cover him with your gun. If he let's out a yip, you shoot. I mean it, Herman, for I'm just about fed up with you."

Then he and Dan carried their trussed-up victim, white but silent, into the sickroom, where they untied him. In another moment, two arms were antisepticized, and soon the blood was flowing from Herman Fulton's forearm through a little rubber tube into Mary Morton's.

Herman watched the performance like one hypnotized. He saw Mary's color return, as she fed upon his life-blood. All his worst fears had come to pass. This vampire, whom he had set out to slay, the evening before, was now feasting upon him; but, instead of perching on his body with two sharp white teeth piercing his throat, she was lying luxuriously in bed, while two up-to-date doctors were doing all the work of the transfusion. What a strange modernizing of mediæval superstition! Herman even felt himself under the influence of that lethargic stupor which—from his reading—he well knew that vampires are able to produce in their victims.

Meanwhile several of Herman's staunchest henchmen gathered outside.

Old Dr. Porter viewed them from the window of the sickroom; then turning back, he announced, "We're not out of the woods yet. In addition to all the trouble we're having with our patient, the

mob may get up its courage again before we are through."

"Sh," admonished the younger doctor. "Mary is coming out of her trance again."

AS HERMAN grew weaker and weaker, the flush of health gradually spread over Mary's features. She stirred in the bed, and opened her eyes.

"Herman," she breathed, "where am I? I had a most awful dream. I dreamed that I was dead and buried, and that you came and dug me up. What's this on my arm? And all these doctors and a nurse! What's it all about, father?"

But Dr. Porter, admonishing the others to silence, said: "You've been very sick, Mary. But we've given you a blood-transfusion, and you're all right now."

"Herman, dear," said the girl, as she turned a beatific smile toward her fiancé, "you gave your blood to save my life. I remember calling for you in my dream. I left the grave, and came and stood by your bed, and begged you to help me. You seemed frightened or horrified then; I could not tell which. But you *did* come. You love me very much, dear, don't you?"

Fulton hung his head in shame, and said nothing.

Dr. Porter announced bruskly, "The patient must have absolute rest for a while. Every one, except the nurse, must go now —even the beloved Herman."

Fulton glowered at him, but obediently left the room with the others, Mary's trusting glance lingering on him as he went.

As soon as he was outside, the old doctor whispered to him, "You'd better get to bed, Herman. You're a very weak man, just now."

"You can go right to bed here in our spare room," offered Mary's father, hospitably.

To which Dr. Crane added, "Fine! Then we can keep our eyes on him."

Herman, however, needed no surveillance. He was weak and shaken. He was through—at least for the present. So far as he was concerned, old Dracula could go to the devil! Herman himself wanted to go to bed. So he did.

But Herman Fulton was not permanently defeated. He had merely suffered a temporary setback. He was merely weak from loss of blood. But he was still president of the Yankton Bank. He still held most of the overdue mortgages in town. He was still engaged to Mary Morton. And she still adoringly regarded him as her rescuer.

12. *The Denouement*

BY EVENING, Herman Fulton had completely recovered his poise. Whatever might be his future plans for combatting the Dracula menace, he realized that for the present it would pay him to dissemble, and to try and make friends with the enemy.

So he warmly, and with apparent sincerity, urged Ralph Crane to return to his Yankton practise. But the young doctor declined. He could not bear to stay and see his Mary, whose life he himself had saved, happily give herself in marriage to the man who had tried to kill her.

"Herman," said he, after refusing the other's offer, "for once you can put your fiendish mortgage-system to a good use. Let it be known by every participant of last night's attempted outrage, that if the least hint of it ever reaches Miss Morton's ears, you will run the person responsible out of town."

Just then Peter Larousse was announced. He had come to inquire as to the health of the patient. The two doctors reported that Mary was already

greatly improved under the new line of treatment, based on Dr. Crane's diagnosis.

Then Herman asked a bit apprehensively what Larousse's plans were.

"You will be relieved to know," the old man replied with dignity, "that I am at once shaking the dust of this town off my feet forever. How my father could ever have felt any affection for Yankton, is beyond my comprehension. But I have carried out his wishes, and have buried him here.

> "Here he lies where he longed to be,
> Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
> And the hunter home from the hill.

"But, as for me," Larousse continued, "I am moving tonight back to civilization. Dr. Crane, I am going to accept your offer, made when I first came here, to treat my dermatitis. I shall put up at your hospital in New York. You have won my respect. And there are two other people in this town who are deserving of respect, namely, Miss Morton and the taxi-man. I still mistrust you, Mr. Fulton, for a dangerous idiot. So I shall instruct my solicitors to pay off the Callahan and Morton mortgages."

"God bless you, sir; you're a brick!" exclaimed the young Irishman.

"Why—why—why," stammered Pop Morton. "Why, it'll put me on my feet for the first time in years! You can't realize what it means to me, Mr. Dracula—uh, I mean, Mr. Larousse."

Herman Fulton looked daggers at this man who dared to free two victims from his (Herman's) clutches.

Larousse continued, "Dr. Porter, I hope that you will use your bank-stock to curb Mr. Fulton's impetuosity. And of course, I assume that Miss Morton has broken, or will break, her engagement?"

"Unfortunately no," replied Dr. Crane bitterly. "She credits her fiancé with last night's rescue."

Herman hung his head.

"And you don't propose to disillusion her?" asked Larousse in surprize.

"Why should I?" countered Crane. "She loves Herman, so it would be best for her never to know the truth."

"Doctor Crane," remonstrated Dan Callahan, "if you'll excuse my impertinence, I think you're all wet. You've got Herman by the tail now, so why not give it a twist? If I were you, sir, I'd tell Miss Morton all the facts. Begging your pardon, sir, but she loves you, and you love her, and she's only marrying that skunk out of loyalty and mistaken gratitude."

"What?" exclaimed Herman Fulton and Pop Morton in unison.

The young doctor colored.

"No, no, Dan," he remonstrated, "you are mistaken. Miss Morton and I are merely warm friends; that is all. If there is even any suspicion of anything else, it is just as well that I am leaving town for good."

"Yes, I agree with you," interposed Herman, a bit too enthusiastically.

Dr. Crane glowered at him.

Dan Callahan snorted with disgust.

"I'm beginning to think," he averred, "that there's only two people in this town that ain't crazy; me and Mr. Larousse. Thank you again, Mr. Larousse, for fixing up my mortgage so that I can stay right in Yankton and make Herman Fulton watch his step. I'll pay you back some day, sir. And as for you, Doctor Crane, I hope you'll come to your senses before it's too late. So long, everybody."

And he stalked out.

Pop Morton, Monsieur Larousse, Herman Fulton, and the two doctors tried to keep up conversation for a while, but at last it lagged. Every one except "old Dracula" felt tense and embarrassed.

At last Dr. Crane remarked, "Well, it's almost time for the night train east. If Doctor Porter doesn't mind, I think I'll go upstairs and say good-bye to Mary."

The older doctor nodded, and young Crane passed from the room.

He found the nurse standing by Miss Morton's door with an amused smile on her face. She opened the door for him, but discreetly remained outside.

Mary was sitting up in bed, pale but smiling. Crane advanced toward her eagerly.

And then he noticed that they were not alone.

"What on earth are *you* doing here, Callahan?" he demanded, coming to a halt.

But it was Mary who answered.

"He's been telling me the truth, Ralph," said she. "Oh, Ralph, you poor dear silly noble-minded old darling! Why did you want me to marry a superstitious moron, who tried to kill me, instead of yourself, who saved my life? Ralph, dear, I've loved you ever since you came to town, but I haven't realized it until right now."

And she held out her arms to the astonished young doctor.

"Take it or leave it, Doc," said Dan Callahan, with a grin, as he walked out of the room.

And Dr. Crane took it.

[THE END]

The Hills of Discontent

***By* LOUIS E. THAYER**

A fair land—a rare land—a land of heart's desire—
  Beckons to me ever and calls me in my dreams.
The bright stars—the white stars—are setting it on fire
  And, in the golden moonlight, each gilded turret gleams.
My eyes are dim from gazing and my strength is well-nigh spent,
But always intervening are the Hills of Discontent.

A glad youth—a mad youth—a youth of reckless years—
  Stretches far behind me and mocks at my regret.
The bold dreams—the old dreams—are driving me to tears
  But, for all my striving, I never can forget.
I am thinking of that fair land and all it might have meant,
While looming all around me are the Hills of Discontent.

The dark hills—the stark hills—the hills of midnight gloom—
  Blanket all the landscape and stifle from my view
That fair land—that rare land—that land of song and bloom—
  The bright stars—the white stars—have sought to lead me to.
There is not a heart to answer, as I voice my vain lament,
Though an echo ever mocks me from the Hills of Discontent.

The House of the Skull

by Arlton Eadie

"For an instant the madman hesitated."

IT WAS twenty minutes past 10 on a Saturday night, and the final performance of the stirring melodrama, *The Spot of Blood,* was drawing to its close at the Alexandra Theater, when a well-appointed car drew up at the stage door and a primly dressed old gentleman alighted, and, after a momentary hesitation, pushed open the swing door and entered.

"Yes, sir?" said the doorkeeper, peering at the stranger through the window of his boxlike habitation.

The old gentleman advanced and cleared his throat somewhat nervously.

"There is, I believe, a certain—er—actor in this company whose name is Denis Stirling," he said. "Would it be possible for me to have a few words with him?"

The doorkeeper glanced up at the tiny clock. "Mr. Stirling will be on the stage now, sir. It's against the rules for strangers to go behind, but, of course"—something passed from hand to hand and the man's manner underwent a change—"of course, you can wait at the wings. They'll be ringing down on the last act in a few minutes. This way, sir."

Following his guide through an iron door which bore the forbidding injunction "Keep Out," the newcomer found himself in a kind of alleyway flanked on one side by a gaunt, whitewashed wall and on the other by a series of narrow, canvas-covered frames, each bearing rows of dazzling electric lights, beyond which came the sound of voices. One was the sweetly pleading tones of a girl; the other the coldly sneering voice of the conventional "heavy man."

A sudden scream—a pistol-shot—then a burst of thunderous applause told of virtue triumphant and villainy overcome. A minute later:

"This is the gentleman you want to see, sir," said the doorkeeper, and the visitor

turned to find himself confronting a tall, sallow-faced, black-mustached man who at that moment was engaged in brushing from his garments some of the dust which they had picked up during his recent demise.

"Can I have a word with you, sir?" said the old man.

"Certainly," returned Denny Stirling. "Come up to my dressing-room right now."

Passing through another iron door and ascending a flight of stone steps, the visitor found himself in a small room with plainly distempered walls. The only furniture was a broad, high bench of deal running the length of the room, a large looking-glass, and two large, theatrical traveling-baskets.

"I must apologize for troubling you during—er—business hours, Mr. Stirling. My name is Mr. Lambert, of Durgan and Lambert, solicitors, and I am here on behalf of Colonel Sir George Wolverton."

Denny's eyes lighted up with sudden interest. "Sir George is my godfather," he said quickly. "It's years since I heard from him."

"Quite so. It is owing to that fact that I had such a difficulty in finding you. But now that I have succeeded, it were better to explain my business without delay. I believe I am not far from the truth in saying that the estrangement between you was mainly due to the fact that you decided to throw up your commission in the Tank Corps immediately after the war?"

The young actor nodded. "Sir George has no son of his own, and I suppose that accounts for the great interest he took in me," he said. "My father and he were old comrades-in-arms in Burma, and their friendship continued up to my father's death in 1907. After that, Sir George practically adopted me, but I fear that I bitterly disappointed him when I went on the boards. There was a stormy scene when I told him of my decision, and from that day I've neither seen nor heard from him. I was under the impression that he was in Burma."

"He returned to this country three years ago," the solicitor informed him, "and from that time he has been making unceasing efforts to trace you; but, probably owing to the—er—wandering nature of your profession, his efforts were unsuccessful."

"That's scarcely surprizing, for I've been touring the States for the past eighteen months, and before that I was doing three-week stands with a repertoire company in South Africa."

"That accounts for our failure," said Mr. Lambert. "It was quite by chance that I happened to see your name mentioned in this week's *Stage*, and I lost no time in looking you up. Sir George desires me to convey to you the message that he is anxious to let bygones be bygones, and to ask you to come to him without delay, for he has a great and urgent need of your presence. He did not take me fully into his confidence, but I have gathered from certain signs that I have noted, that he is under the impression that some danger is threatening both himself and his daughter Julie. My car is waiting outside, so if you're agreeable I will take you to him now."

A tense expression had mounted to Denny's face as the lawyer made the explanation. Now he turned briskly and slipped off his coat.

"Of course I'll come. Please excuse me while I get rid of my 'war-paint'."

He peeled the swarthy mustache from his upper lip as he spoke, then proceeded to smear his face with some greasy compound. A quick rub of a towel, and the pale, sallow make-up gave place to a natural healthy tint; another rub, and the scowling brows and sinister lines about the eyes vanished as if by magic. It was a

much more attractive young man than the suave, foreign-looking "villain" who presently turned to his highly interested companion.

"All ready, Mr. Lambert? Then let's be off. By the way," he said as they descended the staircase to the street, "where is Sir George living?"

"He has a house at Highspur Heath, in Kent, about an hour's run from here," was the lawyer's answer. "I fancy you'll be rather surprized at the house, for it is an unusual structure to find in the suburbs of London. Its style of architecture is decidedly Eastern, and the residents of the neighborhood have given it a somewhat grim nickname. They call it *The House of the Skull.*"

IT WAS past midnight when the car began to mount the steep and narrow road which led to their destination, its headlights casting grotesque, racing shadows amid the pine woods as it swung round the bend. On their left, the lofty plateau of Highspur Heath sloped steeply down to the low-lying marshes, beyond which the distant reaches of the Thames shone like a silver serpent in the rays of the moon.

Presently the car left the road and entered a graveled drive which wound through a coppice of young pines. They had proceeded over a mile when Denny, though far from being of a nervous disposition, began to get vaguely uneasy.

"Where are we?" he asked, turning to his companion.

"Near to our destination," was the answer. "Look!"

Through a gap in the foliage Denny caught sight of a structure which would have seemed more in keeping with the cloudless skies of the Orient than the English countryside. Built of white marble, and surmounted by a huge, bulging dome, it looked more like a mosque or a Buddhist temple than a residence on the outskirts of London. Seen outlined against the somber shadows of the woods, the gleaming white dome bore an uncanny resemblance to a fleshless human skull, a resemblance that was heightened by two horseshoe-shaped windows, appearing like empty eye-sockets, and the door of some dark wood, approached by a flight of semicircular steps which in the distance might have passed for a mouth twisted into a grin of ghastly merriment.

"What an ideal home—for an undertaker," said Denny, laughing. "Is the bogey-man style of architecture a new dodge to scare away the tax-collector?"

"It is rather startling," admitted the solicitor. "But I think you will admit that the interior—er—decorations are quite in keeping with the exterior."

"In that case I ought to have brought some nerve tonic with me," said Denny, and relapsed into silence until the car drew up at the door.

Denny had been half expecting to see the door opened by a be-turbaned and be-whiskered janissary, armed to the teeth; but it was a quite ordinary-looking manservant who relieved them of their hats and coats and intimated, with a decidedly Cockney accent, that Sir George was awaiting them in the library.

"Ah, Denis, my boy, I'm heartily glad to see you." The old soldier had come eagerly forward with outstretched hand the moment the visitors had entered the room. "I was mighty glad to get your 'phone message, Lambert, saying that you had run the wanderer to earth and were bringing him down. So you came straight from the theater, Denny? You must be hungry after your drive. A little supper, and a glass of wine, and then we can talk."

TAKING Denny affectionately by the arm, Sir George led him into an apartment which might have served, as it stood,

as the setting for a performance of *Les Mille et Une Nuits*. The vaulted roof was supported by a series of slender columns, from which sprang horseshoe-shaped arches, the whole carved with intricate, interwoven devices so dear to the heart of the Eastern craftsman. Soft-piled rugs were spread about the marble floor, in the center of which stood a long table. Fireplace there was none; yet the temperature of the room seemed to indicate the existence of some concealed heating-system.

"You have certainly managed to get the Oriental atmosphere in your new house, Sir George," said Denny as he seated himself at the table. "You could almost imagine yourself back in Burma."

The old soldier laughed as he allowed his eyes to roam round the walls.

"That's scarcely surprizing, Denny, considering that the place was built by Burmese craftsmen, specially brought over for that purpose."

"You must have spent a pot of money on this freak——"

"Not a penny," interrupted the old man, smiling at the surprize which his words evoked. "This house was erected by an Eastern potentate, the deposed Nizam of Jeysulpore. I was attached to his suite, and when internal troubles forced him to fly the country, three years since, I accompanied him to England, together with his daughter, the Ranee (princess, that is) Nairona. He had this house built in the style of his native land—for, though deposed, he was still a wealthy man—and he scarcely quitted it during his lifetime."

"So he is dead, then?"

"He died six months ago."

"And bequeathed this place to you?" cried Denny Stirling.

Sir George Wolverton raised his glass and thoughtfully sipped its amber contents.

"Yes, I inherited this house and everything it contains," he said slowly. "But there were certain strange conditions attached to the bequest. These were so fantastic that I at first thought that they might render the will invalid. My claim was not contested, however, and I came into possession in due course."

"What were those conditions?" inquired the interested Denny.

"They were two: firstly, I must undertake to look after and educate the Ranee Nairona in a manner befitting her rank; secondly, I must pay due honor, and promise faithfully to obey, the injunctions of Yemma Ten."

Denny glanced up curiously at his godfather as he uttered the last words, for there had seemed to be a note of reverence—almost, he thought, of fear—in his voice.

"Who may Yemma Ten be?" the young man asked quickly.

"When you have finished supper I will show you."

"I've finished already, thank you," said Denny, rising as he spoke. So impressive and mysterious had his host's manner become that he felt an overpowering curiosity to get to the bottom of the matter.

Sir George crossed to the door, then looked back at the solicitor, who had been an interested, though silent, listener to the interview.

"Would you care to accompany us, Mr. Lambert?"

The lawyer shook his head, while an expression of distaste, almost laughable in its intensity, twisted his clean-shaven features.

"Thank you, Sir George, but I'd much rather be excused," he said hastily. "I've had the pleasure of making the gentleman's acquaintance on a previous occasion, and I've no desire to repeat the experience. As for our young friend," he went on, glancing at Denny, "I would ad-

vise him to sample a stiff peg of your admirable cognac before he leaves this room. Maybe he'll need it!"

Sir George answered this sally with a smiling shrug as he led the way from the room. A long, dimly lighted corridor terminated in a flight of stairs so long that, when they reached the bottom, Denny surmised that they must be considerably below the level of the ground. Traversing another corridor, Sir George unlocked a heavy door and motioned him to enter. The next moment Denny's eyebrows rose and a long "Whew!" of astonishment escaped him.

The room may not have been very large, but the lustrous greenish tiles with which the interior was lined made its exact limits difficult to define, and this effect of almost infinite space was intensified by the peculiar manner in which the place was illuminated. Vague, diffused lights, apparently concealed behind the walls so that their rays actually shone through them, made it appear as though the beholder were enclosed within banks of greenish mist, or as though he stood on the bed of some shallow sea, with the tempered sunlight filtering wanly through the water. So real and insistent was this impression that Denny found himself involuntarily taking a deep breath, like a swimmer preparing to dive, before he stepped across the threshold into that shimmering luminosity.

Before him, seemingly enthroned in the center of an opaque cloud, a huge and hideous idol towered menacingly. The crimson and gold of its lacquered robes stood out against the vague and neutral-tinted background in startling contrast, emphasizing every curve of its gross, misshapen body, but not sufficiently so as to detract any from the malevolence from the glare of its oblique eyes, or the menace from the hideous, fang-fringed jaws.

Sir George came forward and laid his hand on the repulsive figure. "Demon-worship was at one time very prevalent in Burma," he said, "but the cult of this particular deity has now practically died out. The subjects of the late King Theebaw were certainly not over-squeamish where human suffering was concerned, but even they revolted against the ghastly rites which accompanied the worship of this god—or rather devil. But there are still a few devotees to be found, and of these my friend the Nizam of Jeysulpore was one. Indeed, so zealous was he in its worship that he used to declare he could hear the voice of the idol conversing with him when he lay prostrate before it. And"—the old man glanced quizzically up at the repulsive countenance and shrugged slightly—"this is the idol whose orders I have faithfully promised to obey."

The young actor smiled. "A fairly safe promise on your part, Sir George, seeing that there's small prospect of any orders being issued. By the way, what is the name of His Serene Ugliness?"

Sir George's voice sank almost to a whisper as he made answer: "They call him Yemma Ten—the King of Hell."

Denny's smile broadened into an unconcealed grin. "He's certainly made up well for the part!" was his comment as he turned to quit the room.

THE following morning Denny lost no time in hurrying down to the breakfast room. He had not met Julie Wolverton since the day he had so bitterly quarreled with the old baronet, and had quitted his house with the intention of never returning. It had been but a boy-and-girl affection which had existed between the young subaltern, as he was then, and Julie, but Denny was conscious, nevertheless, of a quickening of his pulses as he caught sight of her familiar figure amid those unfamiliar Oriental surroundings.

"Denny!" her eyes lit up with pleased surprize as she ran forward to greet him. "So our sleuth-hound has managed to run you to earth at last? Oh, I am glad to see you again!"

"Thanks, Julie, I'm registering the same emotion," he answered, taking her hand in his. "But I must say that I can scarcely congratulate your father on his choice of a private detective. Mr. Lambert may be an excellent family solicitor, but as a tracker of lost actors he strikes me as being a bit of a back number. A letter addressed to me, care of the *Stage* 'Letter-box', would have found me months ago."

"Is that so? I must remember that in case you take it into your head to disappear again. Come and sit down here and tell me all about your doings. What play are you appearing in?"

"It's a sweet little thing entitled *The Spot of Blood,*" answered Denny, taking the vacant half of the ottoman.

"Is it a nice play?"

Denny made a wry face. "Perfectly lovely!" He clasped his hands in mock ecstasy. "Its general construction and dialogue bear certain indications that it was thrown off between luncheon and dinner by a lightning author who had his mind on something else."

"Did you play the hero?" she asked eagerly.

"Alas, no," he shook his head sorrowfully. "I was cast for the bold, bad villain. I absolutely wallowed in gore before my own fate overtook me in time to make an effective curtain at the finish. Let me see," he went on, gravely ticking off his victims on his fingers, "In the first act I shot the usual aged banker to get the 'jew-hills', then removed my accomplice by putting prussic acid in his cold tea. In the second act, after setting fire to the old mill, with the rightful heir inside, I——"

He broke off short and looked at the girl in surprize. Her pretty face had gone death-white, and into her large, long-lashed eyes there had crept a look of unmistakable fear.

"Why, what's the matter, Julie?" he cried, his jesting tone changing to one of real concern. "I hope my silly nonsense——"

She rose hastily to her feet and swept her hand across her forehead.

"It's nothing," she said in a low voice. "But your words recalled a rather terrifying experinece. Did you know that we had a murder here a few months ago?"

"The deuce you did!" jerked out the startled Denny. "Sir George never said a word about it to me."

"Perhaps he means to tell you later. He was very much upset at the time, and now he does not like the subject to be referred to. It was an old Buddhist priest, a Chinaman called Chien-tao, and he was found by Hawkins, the butler, lying strangled in front of that awful idol downstairs."

"Was the murderer caught?" Denny's face was serious enough now.

Julie Wolverton shook her head. "Foul play was not suspected," she replied. "The doctor who was called in was so positive that the cause of death was an apoplectic seizure that the verdict at the inquest was 'natural causes.' But I know different. I happened to be the first on the scene after Hawkins gave the alarm, and almost the first thing I noticed was a narrow livid mark around the old man's throat."

"Why did you not mention that to the doctor?"

"I did so, but," she made a little helpless gesture—"when he arrived the mark had disappeared."

"Disappeared?" echoed Denny.

"Yes. I even went so far as to look myself. Dr. Furmby said I must have been mistaken, and was almost rude to me when I persisted in my statement. You see, the doctor is an old army M. O., and is somewhat apt to be overbearing and dictatorial

once he has made up his mind. At any rate, he succeeded in bringing the jury to his way of thinking."

"And your father, Sir George——"

"He was greatly agitated when I told him what I had seen. Later on, however, he seemed to come round to Dr. Furmby's view, and said that my eyes must have deceived me. But I'm positive about what I saw. I am convinced that Chien-tao was murdered, and in some mysterious way his death is connected with the idol he was worshipping at the time—Yemma Ten."

"I know," nodded Denny. "The King of The-place-that-is-never-mentioned-by-lady-novelists. Gee! what a case it would have been for one of those super-detectives that you sometimes read about!"

It was a very thoughtful Denny Stirling that paced the terrace as he smoked an after-breakfast cigarette. As one accustomed to the use of theatrical make-up, he had realized something of which the army doctor was ignorant. By means of a rapid smear of No. 5 greasepaint, the livid mark could have been rendered indiscernible against the Chinaman's yellow skin.

"I think," he said softly, tossing away his cigarette and making for the house, "I'd like to have another look at His Satanic Majesty."

REMEMBERING that the door of the underground temple had been locked on the occasion of their previous visit, Denny kept on the alert as he entered the house, expecting to catch sight of Sir George. But the old soldier was nowhere to be found, and Hawkins, whom he found pottering about the great gilded apartment which served as a smoking-room, professed ignorance of his whereabouts. Denny had almost decided to postpone his visit when a sudden idea came to him. Possibly his godfather had entered the temple again for some purpose or other.

It seemed as though his surmise were correct, for the heavy teak door was slightly ajar. As he approached, Denny was aware of the fumes of some sweet-smelling incense floating through the half-open door, and suddenly he remembered the terms of the Nizam's will. His curiosity now thoroughly aroused, he pushed open the door and entered.

The vague lighting of the room was further dimmed by a cloud of incense which rose in gray spirals from a golden tripod, and through the billowing fumes he could see a figure crouched before the devil-god in seemingly devout supplication. But a single glance was sufficient to convince him that it was not Sir George Wolverton.

It was a young Indian girl of peculiar grace and beauty. Her slender, softly rounded form was draped in a clinging robe of some Eastern fabric, while a veil of the same material enhanced rather than concealed the dusky pallor of her flawless features. Her finger-nails, like the toes which peeped from her tiny, jeweled sandals, were stained with henna, while the eyes which shone beneath her veil might have owed something of their alluring mystery to the skilful application of kohl. As she knelt there, a vision of nymphlike grace, it seemed to Denny as though he were beholding a houri of Paradise doing homage to the Lord of the Lost.

But, however strange her orisons might be, Denny was not one to spy upon them. Treading softly, he turned to retrace his steps. But some slight sound must have betrayed his presence. With a sudden, gliding movement she rose to her feet and stood facing him, her breast rising and falling rapidly beneath its gauzy covering, her dark, inscrutable eyes fixed full upon his.

"I hope I did not startle you," Denny began, awkwardly enough. "I happened to wander in here—I didn't know——"

The slim shoulders rose in a little shrug and her lips parted in a smile.

"Do not mention it, I beg of you." Greatly to his surprize, she spoke in perfect English; the faint singsong intonation which she gave to certain words only seemed to add to the charm of her rich, low-pitched voice. "You are Mr. Stirling, are you not?"

Denny bowed. "And you are the Ranee Nairona, I presume?"

The low Eastern obeisance with which she greeted his question seemed to be rather exaggerated.

"Such is the name of thine unworthy slave—as they say in the country where I was raised," she was laughing openly now. "But, as they say in the state where I went to college, 'It's a cinch—you sure jumped on it with both feet that time, wise boy'."

Denny gasped. "Why, you're American——"

"Educated—yes. Otherwise I'm a sure enough genuine product of bright little Burma—which I haven't seen since I was five years old, by the way."

"Then why on earth——" began Denny, then stopped. All he could do was to make a gesture toward the loathsome idol.

"Oh, you saw me saying my piece, and I guess you were real shocked? I was just seeing if Yemma Ten had any message for me today."

"Message?" repeated Denny, scarcely able to believe his ears. "You don't mean to say that you believe that image——"

"Talks? Sure thing I do! My papa, the late Nizam, had often heard it, and so has Sir George, my guardian, if he cares to speak the truth."

"Have you heard it yourself?" asked Denny with a faint smile.

"Yes." All the laughter had vanished from her eyes, and a little shudder passed through her as she spoke. "I heard it once—the night after Chien-tao died."

Denny darted a quick glance at her. "Indeed? That sounds interesting. What language did he speak? I'm rather curious to know the prevailing tongue at the 'underground headquarters'."

"He spoke in your own language, Mr. Stirling," she answered, without a smile.

"English?" cried the amused young actor. "Hurrah! Good old 'Rule Britannia!' As a citizen of that country, I'm wondering if I ought to feel flattered."

He looked at her as he spoke and noted with surprize the tense expression on her face.

"It is the custom of your country to deride the things they can not understand," she said coldly. "But beware how you tempt the vengeance of Yemma Ten!"

She flung her arm upward toward the grinning idol, then without another word hurried from the room. Standing like a man stunned, Denny heard the patter of her sandaled feet die away down the passage.

As a general rule Denny Sterling played a good game of tennis, but that afternoon Julie found him a far from formidable opponent during their set after lunch. Try as he might, Denny found the face of the beautiful and mysterious Ranee ever getting between him and the ball, while his mind was constantly speculating on the veiled warning which seemed to underlie her parting words. At last he threw down his racket in disgust.

"It's no use, Julie," he said, "I can't set my mind on the game. Let's sit here and talk. There's a whole heap of things that I want to get straightened out. In the first place, who is this Indian princess? what's she doing in this house? and why does she bow down before that beastly image in the cellar?"

Julie seated herself on the rustic seat by the side of the lawn and flashed a look at him beneath her long lashes.

"She's very beautiful, isn't she, Denny?" she said almost wistfully.

The boy lit a cigarette and flicked the match away with a gesture of indifference.

"I'm not interested in her looks," he returned, though in a tone which did not carry conviction to his hearer.

"And she has no end of treasure—jewels and rubies—especially rubies—Burma is famous for its ruby mines, you know."

"Neither am I interested in her wealth," was Denny's impatient answer. "What I *am* interested in is the fact that she seems part and parcel of the mystery which overhangs this house."

Julie Wolverton raised her eyebrows slightly.

"You're not trying to be dramatic, are you?" she asked in surprize.

"No, I'm not," he purposely ignored the sarcasm in her voice. "The fact is, Julie, your Burmese princess told me a very queer story about the idol which forms the centerpiece to that underground temple. She says it talks to people."

The girl started and looked up quickly. "Talks," she repeated; then, half to herself: "That's strange, I thought it was merely my imagination."

"You mean to say that you've heard it too?" he cried.

She looked at him queerly. "I suppose if I say 'yes' you'll begin to suspect I am *non compos mentis?*"

Denny repudiated the outrageous suggestion so vehemently that she was compelled to cut short his protestations.

"It really is not necessary to take me in your arms to convince me of your belief in my sanity," she told him severely. "But I certainly did think that I heard a voice issue from the mouth of Yemma Ten."

"That's just what Nairona said——"

"I hope you did not signify your belief in her story in the same manner as you did mine," said Julie coldly.

"As a matter of fact I did not believe it," he returned, with a laugh. "I'm frightfully keen to hear what happened to *you*, though."

The compliment was so delicately implied that she relented at once.

"You must understand that one of the conditions by which my father inherited the Nizam's fortune was that he undertook to keep up the rites which were accustomed to be performed in the green temple. Of course, Daddy is not a Buddhist, or anything like that: but the amount of money left him was so huge that he consented. It was, after all, a mere question of lighting certain red candles and burning incense at stated times. One night Daddy felt ill—he had sunstroke in Burma, and the after-effects trouble him now and again—so he asked me to go to the temple and light the candles, and so on. I must confess that I did not like the idea, but he overcame my objections by saying that, as the rites had no real meaning for us, and were performed only out of respect for the memory of the man who had so greatly benefited us, I need not allow any scruples of conscience to stand in my way. Well, in the end I consented, and made my way to the temple, lit the little red candles and the joss-stick, and then stood waiting for them to burn out before I locked up and came away. You know how silent it is in that underground place? I could hear the beating of my own heart as I stood looking up at the hideous face of the idol, wondering what scenes those cruel, slanting eyes had looked upon. And then, without warning, I heard it speak."

Skeptical though he had been at first, now, as he looked into the girl's blanched

face and troubled eyes, Denny could not but believe that she spoke the truth. Half unconsciously his hand closed over hers, and as though reassured by that silent pressure, the girl went on:

"At first it seemed but a vague murmur of sound, like that of running water; but after a while I began to distinguish words. It spoke in Pali——"

"Pali?" echoed the puzzled but interested Denny.

"That is the language used by the Buddhist priests in Burma. Although I could not understand their meaning, I recognized the sound of certain words. For a moment I was too startled even to think; then I cried in Burman—the language of the common people—'Who are you? What do you want with me?' Immediately the voice ceased. Then I just ran for my life, and have never entered the place since."

"Small wonder!" said Denny. "When did this happen?"

"About a month before Chien-tao died."

Denny Stirling rose to his feet, a grim expression on his clean-shaven face.

"Nairona says that he spoke to her in English; you say he spoke in Pali. I think I'll test his linguistic accomplishments for myself."

She rose in her turn and laid a trembling hand on his arm. "You're not about to do anything rash, are you, Denny?"

"I'm merely going to do a bit of listening-in tonight—with a golf-club!" he laughed grimly. "Maybe I'll be able to treat this jabbering devil to such a hot time that he'll be glad to flit back to his native inferno to cool down!"

FEW healthy-minded young men can truthfully say that they have never been conscious of a desire to shine as amateur detectives, and Denny Stirling was certainly no exception to the rule. That there was some deep mystery overhanging "The House of the Skull" he had no doubt whatever. Here, he was convinced, was a heaven-sent opportunity to exercise those inborn gifts of deduction which a natural optimism, and a somewhat extensive acquaintance with popular fiction, had led him to assume that he possessed. He began his self-imposed investigation with promptness and zest.

Somewhat to his surprize he learnt that the actual inmates of the house numbered only five, incuding himself; for the old lawyer had returned to town the previous night. Hawkins, the butler, was the only servant who slept there; the rest, who were Burmans, occupied a separate house near the lodge gates. Having thus narrowed down his field of inquiry, he turned his attention to the butler, a youngish and rather good-looking man whose main characteristics seemed to be a pair of side-whiskers and a pronounced Cockney accent. Denny had not the slightest difficulty in getting the man to talk. In fact, Hawkins came to him unbidden, and seemed positively bursting with clues and information.

"Beg pardon, sir"—it was in the smoking-room, and Hawkins was engaged in emptying ash from the trays—"but I thinks as 'ow there's some funny business going on 'ere."

This sudden and unexpected confirmation of his own suspicions almost made Denny give a shout of surprize. But he concealed his feelings, and it was in a tone of voice indicative of indolent inquiry that he said, "Indeed? To what are you referring, Hawkins?"

The man glanced nervously round and lowered his voice to a husky whisper. "I wouldn't dream of mentioning private matters if you wasn't an old friend o' Sir

George's—one o' the family, so to speak."

Although it seemed to Denny that the man's description of his status was a little premature, he contented himself with nodding an encouraging "Go on."

"The truth is, I'm worried about Sir George. 'E seems queer-like, and—well—I scarcely like to say it, but sometimes seems as if 'e's not quite right 'ere," and he raised his finger to his forehead.

"You mean—mad?" gasped Denny.

Hawkins began to wash his hands with imaginary soap, while a deprecating smile showed on his shaven lips.

"Oh, I should never dream of applying such a word to my employer, sir. But I suppose you know, sir, that Sir George 'ad the misfortune to be attacked with sunstroke in those furrin parts where 'e formerly lived? Maybe 'e 'asn't quite got over it, sir."

"What grounds have you for such a statement, Hawkins?"

The man leant over Denny's chair and sank his voice still further.

"I've 'eard 'im talking to that idol in the cellar—jawing to it for hours and hours. And the look on 'is face! I ain't a very nervous sort o' bloke, sir, but I tell you, the way 'is eyes were glaring fair gave me the shivers!"

So, thought Denny, here's another confirmation of the idol's power of speech. Coming on the top of what he had heard from the two girls, Hawkins' story bore every indication of truth. Still, it was strange that Sir George had affected to regard the story of the voice as an idle fable. But Denny was careful to allow no inkling of his suspicions to appear.

"Thank you, Hawkins. I must think over what is to be done in the matter. But I'm very glad you mentioned it."

Hawkins inclined his head deferentially. "And I am very glad too, sir. It has relieved my mind quite a lot. Good-night, sir."

Half-way to the door the man suddenly paused. "Pardon me, but I was nearly forgetting, sir," he said, then crossed to the sideboard and removed the stopper from a decanter of yellowish liquid. "Before 'e retired for the night, Sir George asked me to inform you that 'e 'ad just received a crate of very excellent old sherry. 'E said it was some that was laid down by the late King Edward, sir, and he particularly wished you to sample it."

Denny took the brimming glass from the man and looked critically into its amber depths. "So, the King's sherry, eh? Well, here's fun!"

As he drained the glass he looked up, to find Hawkins regarding him closely. For an instant the man's face had lost its expression of wooden immobility, and, by doing so, now appeared to awaken some forgoten memory in Denny's mind.

"Haven't I seen you before somewhere?" he asked suddenly.

Hawkins started as though he had been stung; then smilingly shook his head. "I think not, sir. I was formerly in the service of Lord Grancourt, of Grancourt Towers."

Denny suppressed a yawn with difficulty. Although more than usually alert a moment ago, he now felt strangely sleepy.

"I don't—happen to be—on his lor'-ship's vis'ting—list," he muttered thickly as he sank back into his chair. "Goo'-night, Hawkins."

"Good-night, sir."

As the door closed on the retreating butler, Denny Stirling made a last desperate effort to shake off the lethargy that was descending upon him. Staggering to his feet, he made for the door, only to fall

headlong to the ground in the dreamless oblivion of the drugged.

IT WAS midnight, and the green lights of the Temple of Yemma Ten were shedding their ghostly radiance over a weird and tragic tableau.

The room was tenanted by four persons. Three of them lay on the floor motionless; for they were bound hand and foot, and their senses were still dulled from the effects of some powerful narcotic. The fourth, a white-haired and bearded figure clad in a long crimson robe fantastically embroidered with many-clawed golden dragons, was bowing and gesturing before the statue of the King of Hell.

For a while Denny's drug-numbed senses took in the scene before him with a vague indifference. The horrible dream—for such it must surely be—would pass. Presently he would awake to find himself lying comfortably in bed. But, instead of passing away, the dream seemed every moment to be growing more vivid. Nor were his sensations merely mental; he could smell the reek of Asiatic incense and feel the constricting grip of ropes on his wrists and ankles. Then, with a shock which dispelled the last fumes of the drug from his brain, he realized the truth. The seeming vision was stern reality. Julie, Nairona and himself were helpless prisoners; while before the altar, robed in the fantastic vestments of its diabolical ritual, was Sir George Wolverton.

Unbidden, the butler's warning flashed to Denny's mind. The old colonel's face seemed transfigured with insane frenzy; indeed, had it not been for his rather long white hair and beard, Denny might have failed to recognize him. From the old man's lips there came a low intermittent muttering which sounded like an incantation addressed to the idol which towered above him. Denny strained his ears to catch the words.

"O Yemma Ten, thou mighty Spirit of Evil, what are thy commands?" Then came a pause, during which the madman stood motionless as if awaiting the idol's answer; presently he went on: "Make known thy will, O Yemma Ten, that thy servant may know how to serve thee. Art thou hungry for the blood of sacrifice, O King? Dost thou long for the writhing victims that gladdened thy sight in the days of long ago? Behold, my arm is strong and my dagger keen. I but await thy word to strike."

Upon the old man's face there came a look of horrible expectancy as he lifted his glaring eyes and fixed them on the loathsome face above. His hand, which had been hidden in the bosom of his robe, now appeared grasping a long-bladed native knife.

A band of steel seemed to clamp itself round the young actor's heart as he realized that the maniac was waiting the signal to plunge the weapon into the heart of the girl he loved.

"Sir George—Sir George!" he cried, tugging wildly at his bonds. "For heaven's sake listen to me! Do you know what you are about to do?"

Something in the familiar voice seemed to penetrate the poor, demented brain. Sir George paused with uplifted dagger and slowly turned his head toward the speaker.

"Who calls upon Sir George Wolverton?" he asked in a shaking voice.

"It is I—Denny—surely you remember Denny?" cried the boy, still making frantic efforts to free himself. "And the girl you are about to kill is your own daughter, Julie!"

The other's eyes seemed to grow vacant again. "My daughter Julie, you say?" he repeated dully.

"Yes, your own daughter, who loves you——"

A delirious laugh broke from the old man's lips. "And therefore the more acceptable sacrifice!" he raved.

Suddenly he paused and bent his head as though listening to some voice audible to him alone.

"The sign! The sign!" he screamed —though Denny could have sworn that no sound came from the idol. "The god has spoken. The appointed time is at hand. Maiden, prepare to meet thy fate!"

There was a flash of steel as he flung up the weapon to strike, but before it could descend, Denny—fear urging him to attempt a feat which would be impossible at a calmer moment—had lurched forward on his knees and thrust his bound hands between the gleaming knife and the snowy bosom beneath.

Denny never felt the pain when that razorlike edge pierced his wrist. All that he was conscious of was the fact that the downward stroke had severed the rope, and his hands were free. If he could but gain enough time in which to loosen the bonds of his feet, all might yet be well. But the armed madman was hovering just out of his reach, ready to strike at him at the first opportunity. Denny uttered a low moan, and allowed his head to sink forward as though fainting from loss of the blood which was flowing freely from his arm. But through his half-shut eyes he carefully measured the distance between his apparently inert hands and the heavy brass candlestick on his right.

For an instant the madman hesitated as though suspecting a ruse. Then, with a howl like that of a wild beast, he launched himself upon the kneeling figure.

With a quick sidewise movement Denny avoided the murderous point, and before the other could recover he had grasped the candlestick and brought it down full upon his head.

The man dropped like a log—but that was not what caused the shout of wonder to leap from Denny's lips. Under his smashing blow Sir George's snow-white hair and beard had been sent whirling to the farther end of the room, revealing the close-cropped dark head and clean-shaven features of Hawkins, the butler of "The House of the Skull"!

IT WAS only after the prisoner had been lodged in the local cells, and the police had made an examination of his belongings, that the full extent of the ingenious plot became known.

"These documents and photos that we found in his trunk are conclusive," said the police-inspector as he sat in the gilded smoking-room the following morning. "Hawkins' real name was Vincent Wolverton."

"My cousin!" gasped Julie, who sat, still shaken by her terrible experience, at the other end of the table.

"Yes, he was Sir George's nephew, and," the officer added grimly, "the sole heir to the Nizam's fortune once you and your father were out of the way. By killing you before the eyes of two independent witnesses, who would be forced to testify that Sir George committed the murder, he would at one stroke remove the only barriers between himself and a very comfortable inheritance. It seems that at one time he had been a character-actor in a traveling company under the name of Vincent St. Clair."

Denny uttered an exclamation. "That's where I must have seen him!" he cried. "I thought I recognized his face."

"It may have been by accident that he discovered that the Chinese priest, Chien-

tao, was in the habit of concealing himself inside the idol, and speaking through its open mouth; but whether he actually murdered the old priest is a question which I fear it is too late to answer now. At any rate, there is no doubt that Vincent Wolverton continued the deception as a part of his plan; but, being ignorant of the Burman language, he was compelled to speak in English. Taken altogether, it was a very well-laid scheme," the inspector went on in a tone of unfeigned professional admiration. "By carefully gaging the strength of the various doses of dope which he administered to each member of the household, he so arranged it that whereas the two witnesses of the crime should awake after an hour or so, Sir George and Miss Julie would sleep sounder, the one until he was arrested by the police, the other until she passed into that sleep that knows no awakening. With the evidence of two eye-witnesses to prove his guilt, the unfortunate Sir George—even if he escaped the gallows—must inevitably have received a life sentence. After a prudent interval our clever friend Vincent would have appeared in his real identity, claimed the fortune, and everything in the garden would have been lovely. But now, instead of lucre, he's going to get a lifer!"

The inspector proved a true prophet. Mainly through the evidence which Denny and Julie had to curtail their honeymoon to give, such was the actual sentence which rewarded Vincent Wolverton's desperate bid for fortune in "The House of the Skull".

FELLOWSHIP

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

O ye that follow the sun,
O ye that follow the light
Of the fen-fire through the night,
Are your ways in the end not one?

Ye shall know but the selfsame doom,
Ye shall sleep the selfsame sleep;
And the trench of the trooper is deep
As the vault of an emperor's tomb.

Though dolor be yours, and dearth,
And the noon be darkness above,
Or ye know delight and love
In the pleasant places of earth,

Though your mouths be mirthful or dumb,
When the worm has eaten them thin
Ye shall grin with the same white grin
At the death whereto ye are come.

A Weird Tale of the Sea

The Jelly-Fish

By FRANCIS FLAGG

"SPEAKING of jelly-fish," said the man.

We hadn't been speaking of jelly-fish, nor of anything else for that matter, but the tide had gone out and left the rocky strand full of them.

That morning I had left the village soon after daybreak for a ramble along the shore. I had walked a mile, perhaps, beyond the lighthouse and seated myself on a mussel-encrusted rock. The scene was indescribably bleak and lonely. Behind me dark spruce forest presented an unbroken front; on either hand the inhospitable beach stretched away; while in front the long rollers of the Atlantic came in and broke in smothers of foam. Far out, even on as calm a morning as this, I could see the water boiling and seething over the shoals and the cruel ledges of rock which made the approach to the harbor entrance so dangerous a place for ships in stormy weather.

It was while I sat there, thinking rather sadly, and perhaps morbidly, of the many marine disasters the spot had witnessed, that I became conscious of the man seated on another rock not a dozen feet to one side of me. I had not noticed his approach. He was a big man, not so tall as broad and burly, clad in an enormous pea-jacket (I think that is what they are called) much the worse for wear, and with gaping sea-boots on his feet. His hair and full bushy beard, brown in color but shot through with gray, were long and unkempt. A man of about fifty, I thought. At some recent time he had been wet. The water dripped from his clothes. Kelp and bits of seaweed clung to them. Perhaps in clambering over the slimy rocks he had slipped and fallen into one of the many pools left by the outgoing tide. I wondered how he had managed to approach me unheard. But he might have been on the spot before myself, hidden from view behind one of the many huge rocks. A fisherman, maybe; though what a fisherman could be doing in this place, at such an hour, without a house in sight or a fishing-boat to be seen along the shore, puzzled me. However, I wasn't curious—not at first. I drew in deep lungfuls of the damp salt air. Immersed in my own thoughts, I poked with the toe of one heavy boot at a viscous mass of jelly. A queer thing, a jelly-fish. Some of them look like glass, clear as crystal, while others are quite highly colored. But there is an immense variety of them, and often, when the wind blows landward, they are driven onto the beach in thousands. Earlier that morning the wind had blown quite a stiff breeze, though by no means a gale. I recalled once reading that jelly-fish were mostly composed of water—about four hundred parts of water to one of solid matter. There is nothing much to them except water, and yet they live and move, have eyes and ears and locomotive powers, and are able to sting, digest, and reproduce their kind. It was a marvelous thing to think of: living, animate water, swimming in and distinct from water. And yet why be

amazed at a jelly-fish? Surely men and animals were just as marvelous. In my own body I was seventy to ninety per cent water. The man on the rock to one side of me. . . . It was then he turned and spoke, the sunlight glinting on his red beak of a nose and hard agate eyes. It gave me quite a start.

"Speaking of jelly-fish," he said, as if reading my thoughts, "I've seen hundreds of 'em, thousands. Not just little fellows like those ones there, but giants" —he made a gesture with his hands— "yes, giants, six, aye, ten feet in circumference, and more than that tall. You've no idea," he said, "what there is down there in the depths of the sea that never comes to the surface, and that no wind blows ashore. But I've seen 'em," he roared, his voice like a fog-horn, like a voice accustomed to shouting against a gale, against the pounding of surf. "Yes, I've seen 'em—me, and two others! Mate of the old *Harlow* I was. You've heard of the *Harlow,* as fast and neat a clipper as ever plied 'tween here and London. Three-master, she was, bark-rigged, built at Glasgow in '45, twenty years old, and able to make the crossing in fourteen days. We were the crack ship of the line, old Captain Hayter in command, and Billy Doan second mate. Billy and me had our fortunes told by a slant-eyed heathen in a Limehouse dive who showed us queer things in a crystal ball; aye, bloody queer things. But we were two-thirds drunk. 'Don't go down to the sea this voyage,' he warns. But by the time the *Harlow* cleared the Thames with seventy passengers and a full cargo under the hatches all memory of the warning had faded. And if it hadn't we would have sailed just the same. For that is the life of a sailor, my lad. Blow high, blow low, he goes down to the sea in ships."

He told me all this in one breath, as it were, and I studied him curiously. His face struck me as being familiar. Somewhere before I had seen it but just where I could not say. The village perhaps . . . and the name *Harlow* evoked something that stirred sluggishly in the depths of my mind.

"Blow high, blow low!" he roared. "And she blew high! Aye, she blew great guns. Snow and sleet. And through the snow and sleet, and the blackness of night, under bare poles, we raced before the gale, raced for the harbor entrance, missed it and struck — struck on them rocks out yonder and went to pieces!

"All night," he said, "the bodies came ashore. The coastguards built huge fires and tried to thaw 'em out, but it weren't no use. Corps they were, and stiff and battered. Yes," he cried, "the bodies of the passengers came ashore that night, and the next day, and the next, men, women and children, seventy of 'em, a piteous sight. And the cabin-boys came ashore, and the stewards, and all of the crew—all save the three of us, Captain Hayter, Billy Doan, and me. We didn't come ashore, no. We went down into the sea with the pilot-house around us, and over us, as good officers should, a midsection of hull pulling us down. Aye, we went down; and there we were, suddenly, at the bottom of the ocean, ten fathoms under, and the roar and the noise of the storm was gone, and we were in blackness and afraid. And Billy Doan he gripped me by the arm and whimpered—whimpered like a child, he did—for around our darkness floated strange phosphorescent lights.

" 'God!' whimpered Billy Doan; and he said: 'D'you remember the crystal? This is what we saw in the crystal.' And the 'old man' was the first to understand, being learned-like and always reading in books. 'Lads,' he says, 'the pilot-house is built of teakwood and the windows snug. It's the air as keeps out the water.'

" 'Look!' cried Billy Doan in a voice that made me freeze to the marrow. 'Look! what's that?'

"Far away, through ghostly waverings of light, we could see giant jelly-fish advancing. Monstrous things they were, six, aye, ten feet around, and tall—I'm telling you, mate, they were tall, with big saucer-like eyes. Yes, they had eyes! They glued 'em to the glass and looked at us. God! it made the flesh creep the way they looked at us. For there was no mistaking their looking. Take their turns they would, just like people at a zoo. It fair made the blood run cold. Billy Doan whimpered again.

" 'I don't mind being a corp. I don't mind being drowned and going to Davy Jones' Locker proper-like. But this . . . this . . .'

"Then we could see that the ghastly horrors were trying to reach in at us. Long streamers fumbled at the glass windows, beat on them. We could hear the glass rattle. We crouched on the floor, cold and miserable; sick, aye, sick with fear. The 'old man' pointed to a part of the floor some feet away. Ghostly phosphorescent light grew there, a malignant eye, for the flooring had started, and there was a hole in the floor, and only the air was holding out the water. Through this hole, breaking the surface of black water, came a long reaching streamer. It stole toward us. We screamed. Billy Doan screamed. For the streamer had him. It wrapped around his body. Billy Doan fought like a madman.

" 'O God!' he shrieked, 'don't let it have me, don't!'

"I sought to tear away the slimy tentacle. The 'old man' grabbed one of his legs, but the boot came away in his hands. Down through the hole went Billy Doan, and the giant jelly-fish enfolded him, ingested him, and he was gone. Aye, the jelly-fish had done for poor Billy Doan, and only we two were left, the 'old man' and me. We glared at one another in horror. We backed into the furthest corner of our refuge. Aye, mate, it was ghastly. Two of us alone on the bottom of the sea, waiting, waiting. The 'old man' went next. . . . I frothed at the mouth, I tore at my hair in despair, for the phosphorescent light grew, the goggle-eye approached, and the streamer, streamer . . ."

But I waited to hear no more. For an increasing unease brought me to my feet. The wild stretch of shore, the dark forest behind me, the weird story of the madman (for I was positive he must be daft), all these things together wrought havoc with my nerves. I walked swiftly away, and after a few yards I looked back and he was standing up and waving his arms at me. I turned away. When I glanced back again he had disappeared. As I say, there were plenty of large rocks, large enough to conceal a man. Nevertheless, I started to run, and I never stopped running until I reached the village. Outside the village I met a coast-guardsman. He shook his head.

"No, sir, I don't know of any such man."

I still persisted. He gave me a peculiar look, I thought.

"There ain't no crazy man in these parts, sir."

I made discreet inquiries in the village, but to no use. Fed up with my holiday I took the government boat that afternoon for the city. I had no longer any desire to tramp bleak seashores. And that is the end of the matter, save for one last thing.

Three months later I was paying a visit to an aunt of mine in Boston. Hanging on the parlor wall was the painted picture of a man, a man with bushy brown hair and beard shot through with gray, a red beak of a nose and hard agate eyes

—a man perhaps fifty years of age. I stared, thunderstruck, for the painted likeness was that of the singular individual whose mad tale I had listened to on the beach.

"Who—who is that?" I faltered.

"Why," said my aunt, "that's a picture of your great-uncle Jim, your grandfather's brother. Surely you've heard about him. He was drowned, and his body never recovered, when the old *Harlow* went down off Sambro."

A Short Weird Story

The Last Incarnation

By WALLACE WEST

HE SAT upon a lichen-covered stone, this gray ghost of what once had been a man, and stared greedily at the dim scene before him.

It was a boy's bedroom into which he peered as through a dark curtain. An eight-year-old tot lay writhing there in the torment of fever. Over him bent a gray-haired physician, his fingers upon the fluttering pulse. Near by sat the parents, the mother asleep of exhaustion in her chair; the father, his eyes wide and dry, seeming to be throwing every effort of his will toward aiding the tortured little body on the bed.

"Do you think he has a chance, doctor?" whispered the father, brushing his hand across his face as though the moth-like wings of death had brushed him.

"Perhaps," responded the physician. "This is the crisis. If he rallies we can save him."

Crouched on his rock close beside the tumbled bed, and yet as immeasurably distant from the room as if he had been on the farthest star, the shadow licked its lips and waited, talons half outstretched as if to throttle the frail form between the sheets.

"Save him!" sneered the phantom. "Oh, yes, by all means you mustn't let him die."

He looked about him. Despite the fact that it was broad daylight in the sickroom this region in which the naked wraith crouched vulture-like upon its rock was shrouded in almost impenetrable gloom. Here and there could be discerned floating blobs of red phosphorescence. Not far away loomed what appeared to be a wall of rock which extended upward into the darkness. The faint gleams which now and then drifted by, served to illuminate stretches of broken ground thickly strewn with boulders.

The creature on the rock turned its attention again to the sickroom. There was no change. A thermometer in the doctor's hand indicated that the fever had crept up a degree in the past hour.

Well, let it rise, smirked the ghost. Let the heat creep up until it drive the boy's spirit—his soul, if you please—out into that vast land of shadows from which some return strangely changed and others —return not at all.

The thing's talons suddenly curled in fury. Why should *he* wander in these cursed glades, playing silly, mad pranks with those others who also had lost the right to possess that greatest of treasures —a body? . . . A body, soft and warm and strong . . . capable of strange pleasures and sweeter vices. He deserved something better than this. He had been a king in his day!

Still hungrily eyeing the bed, the ghost's fancy flitted back to those times when he had ruled, drunk deeply, lusted with fair women, slaughtered and schemed out in that pleasant world of sunshine of which he now could catch glimpses only at high noon.

He thought of sunny Italy when he as Cesare Borgia, Duke of Romagna and Valentinois, had ruled with a bloody hand. That was clever, the way he had poisoned his pretty brother-in-law, the Duke of Bisceglie. He shouted with gleeful laughter at the memory.

In the sickroom the father started and looked out of the window as though he had heard some evil sound.

Whereat the ghost laughed harder. That was good! Looking out the window. And he sitting right by the bed.

His thoughts wandered back again into the old pleasant lives he had lived before the law of Karma began to get its fateful hold upon him. One hundred forty men and six women had climbed the scaffold while he ruled Florence as Cosimo dei Medici, besides the countless others who had died by the daggers and poisons of his gay assassins.

That time when he had been an Inquisitioner also sent his hands rasping against each other in glee. Then his reincarnation as a slave-ship captain, although beneath him, had had its moments. 'Twas a shame the stinking blacks in the hold had generated a plague which swept him and his jolly crew from the bloody decks.

But the old brave days had gone from him during recent incarnations. The mountain of evil Karma which he had been building up since the days of Nineveh and Babylon had borne him slowly downward during these last centuries.

He shivered at the thought of the few short years when he had crawled and sniveled about the rice flats of Shantung as a coolie. His last life had been worse than that though—spent among the offscourings of Limehouse.

And then, after a knife had been driven between his ribs in a waterfront brawl, he had awakened in this foul place where it was borne upon him by the brood which inhabited the fetid hills and valleys, that there would be no more sweet bodies entrusted to his care.

He had been tried generation after generation and found wanting. Each time his sins had dragged him a little farther down. Each time he had been given a chance to improve and each time he had tossed it away for gold and fair women and power.

This was the end, they said. He would linger on a few years or centuries or eons, and finally what was left of his soul would wither away, cut off as it was from the light of the sun, that giver of all life. And he would float about forever as one of those phosphorescent astral corpses which furnished the only light in this infernal region.

SUDDENLY the wraith leaped to its feet. On the bed the boy had stirred and shouted incoherently in delirium. Had the time come? But the frenzy passed and the onlooker resumed his seat on the slimy lava block.

Well, he resumed his meditation, why hadn't *they* let him know what he had been doing? Of what use this ability to remember his past blunders now that it was too late? He could have been a good man. Really there had been much good in him, at least at first. Although a good many people died sudden and painful deaths in Florence and Romagna and Valentinois, the people had built monuments to Borgia and Dei Medici after their deaths. Wasn't the Inquisitioner upholding the hands of the Church, and didn't the slaver spread the benefits of civilization?

His mood changed. No, he had been lying to himself. He had gone down the wide purple way for the pure joy of it; bending people to his iron will to test his power; being cruel because life was short and one was a long time dead.

And now, in this Ultima Thule he had discovered suddenly that he had guessed wrong; that instead one was a long time alive.

For a while, indeed, he had even enjoyed playing tricks on good spiritualists, giving malicious messages through their mediums; causing ouija boards to write obscene words which startled gentle maiden ladies trying to get in touch with their dear departeds.

But memories of the old brave days in Italy had spoiled such vicarious evil-doing for him. First he had become bored. Then, when a leering companion whispered one day that there was no way out; that there would be no more incarnations; that he was in a hell more real than that envisioned by any Inquisitioner, he had gone mad and howled about the stony glens and ledges like those poor things making their last struggle against dissolution into phosphorescence.

But there *was* a way out. A cunning little thing with three legs and a gaunt twisted head had whispered it to him one day as he lay beating his head against a rock in the darkness.

"Listen!" it had simpered. "Wait until some human is in the last throes of sickness and has relaxed his will to live. Wait until he is driven out of his body and mind by burning fever. Then break the slender thread which binds body and soul together. Replace his spirit with your own. Many of us have done it. It means one life more at least. And if you do it once you can continue indefinitely. It is the one loophole in *their* armor. But if you try and fail you will never have another chance." And the malformed thing had winked one rheumy eye at him and slithered away.

So he crouched here in the sickroom, bent on doing the foulest deed of all his thousands of incarnations; bent on casting an innocent soul into outer darkness and inserting his soul spirit into its shrinking body.

But, he defended himself, he had never been given a chance. Take that last life, when as Barry Spivens he had thieved from London wharfs and died with a rusty knife in his lung.

What had started him that time on what the mission preachers called the downward path? His eyes envisioned the night when his drunken father had kicked him out of the house into a blizzard. He had crouched against the door, begging and pleading to come in until he slumped down in the snow and knew nothing more.

He had lost an ear and several fingers and toes from frost-bite that night and had consecrated himself to crime and murder as a revenge against the bitter

world under the tutelage of a wharf-rat who had found him and carried him "home" to a shack beneath the wharves.

He fancied he could still hear his own childish voice whimpering:

"Daddy! I'm cold, Daddy. Please let me in, Daddy. Please let me . . ."

What had once been Barry Spivens came to itself with a start. The poignancy of that memory had made him forget his purpose for a moment.

In the sickroom the figure on the bed was lying quite still while the doctor bent over it, an ear to the heart.

Then Spivens heard again the cry which he had thought to be an echo from his own childhood.

"Please, Daddy. I'm awful cold. Oh, Daddy, where are you? I'm scared." The voice rose to a wailing, agonized scream.

Spivens leaped from his rock. The expected had happened. Spirit and body had become divided by the intense heat of fever. The boy was wandering temporarily across the border of his own dark land. Now was his chance!

Mouth drooling, fingers working, he leaped upon the bed; hurled his invisible form upon the boy's body; placed his lips against its mouth; tore at the slender but silver thread of ectoplasm which still connected body and soul.

But again came that wailing cry:

"Daddy! Daddy! Don't send me away in the dark, Daddy. Can't you hear me? Come and find your little boy."

Involuntarily Spivens turned his head from the task before him and glanced into the surrounding darkness of his ghost realm. Well he knew that the boy, his eyes unaccustomed to the darkness, would wander farther and farther away, now that he had broken that slender ectoplasmic thread.

The ghostly glow from the earthly room faintly lit the lichened rocks. They seemed covered with snow. . . .

"Daddy! I'm awful cold!" The voice was fainter.

Cursing in all the languages he had learned in his many lives, Spivens leaped from the bed.

By God, he never had tortured children. He couldn't start now.

He stumbled wildly over the rocks after the little white figure which was wandering about far down the gorge, its hands outstretched like those of a blind person.

* * * * * * *

BOBBY MARSHALL opened his eyes and stared up into those of his father. The fever had broken. The crisis was past.

"'Sfunny," the boy laughed weakly. "I thought I got lost. An ugly man found me and brought me home. He was cussin' somethin' awful and cryin' at the same time. Was he a good man, Daddy? You said only bad people swore."

"He must have had some good in him anyway if he brought you back," soothed the father while the doctor smiled and poured some medicine into a glass.

On the other side of the veil the ghost of Barry Spivens howled with wolfish laughter. Turning from the scene of his defeat he fled downhill into the blackest of the gorges, his passage stirring a group of phosphorescent blobs into apparent life for a moment. He had failed and the three-legged thing said that after one failure the barrier could not be broken.

Suddenly he stopped in amazement. The darkness of the bleak land, which had been unbroken by star or moon since his arrival, seemed lightening there across the ridges as though in a faint foreshadowing of dawn.

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 438)

endless episode of the bucko mate cast away on the wonderful isle with Greta Whosis the movie beauty. In brief, I admire WEIRD TALES because it is different."

Charles Philip Krauth, of Laguna Beach, California, writes to the Eyrie: "I am enclosing your Eyrie coupon indicating my favorite stories in the current issue. But your space for remarks is so small that I am adding this paragraph in appreciation of the work of Mr. Seabury Quinn, who I believe is the outstanding genius among your authors. He has a delightfully finished style of writing, most refreshing after the infernal cut-down, hackneyed, written-to-sell stuff the authors of America have allowed an ignorant public to force on them. More power to Mr. Quinn—he knows his stuff, and he gets away with it. *Night Terror* by Sara Henderson Hay in your July issue is one of the little poems I find that stick in my memory after once reading, and I have remembered short verses like that which struck my fancy for over twenty years."

"The stories in WEIRD TALES are not weird enough," complains Vaughan Hine, of California, Pennsylvania. "Seabury Quinn's stories are almost always good, in my estimation. You would find that most of your readers want something so weird that it is foul, vile and sickening. Perhaps you may think I do not know what I am talking about, but I do hope to see this letter in print soon, and if there be any reader who does agree with me in my views of weirdness, let him write to 'Ye Editor' and help strengthen my opinion."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in our August issue, as shown by your votes, was *Daughter of the Moonlight,* by Seabury Quinn.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE OCTOBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

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It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

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*A Dying Man's Confession**

By MARK TWAIN

TOWARD the end of last year I spent a few months in Munich, Bavaria. In November I was living in Fräulein Dahlweiner's *pension*, ia, Karlstrasse; but my working-quarters were a mile from there, in the house of a widow who supported herself by taking lodgers. She and her two young children used to drop in every morning and talk German to me—by request. One day, during a ramble about the city, I visited one of the two establishments where the government keeps and watches corpses until the doctors decide that they are permanently dead, and not in a trance state. It was a grisly place, that spacious room. There were thirty-six corpses of adults in sight, stretched on their backs on slightly slanted boards, in three long rows—all of them with wax-like, rigid faces, and all of them wrapped in white shrouds. Along the sides of the room were deep alcoves, like bay-windows; and in each of these lay several marble-visaged babes, utterly hidden and buried under banks of fresh flowers, all but their faces and crossed hands. Around a finger of each of these fifty still forms, both great and small, was a ring; and from the ring a wire led to the ceiling, and thence to a bell in a watch-room yonder, where, day and night, a watchman sits always alert and ready to spring to the aid of any of that pallid company who, waking out of death, shall make a movement—for any, even the slightest, movement will twitch the wire and ring that fearful bell. I imagined myself a death-sentinel drowsing there alone, far in the dragging watches of some wailing, gusty night, and having in a twinkling all my body stricken to quivering jelly by a sudden clamor of that awful summons! So I inquired about this thing; asked what resulted usually? if the watchman died, and the restored corpse came and did what it could to make his last moments easy? But I was rebuked for trying to feed an idle and frivolous curiosity in so solemn and so mournful a place; and went my way with a humbled crest.

Next morning I was telling the widow my adventure when she exclaimed:

"Come with me! I have a lodger who shall tell you all you want to know. He has been a night watchman there."

He was a living man, but he did not

*From *Life on the Mississippi.*

look it. He was abed and had his head propped high on pillows; his face was wasted and colorless, his deep-sunken eyes were shut; his hand, lying on his breast, was talon-like, it was so bony and long-fingered. The widow began her introduction of me. The man's eyes opened slowly, and glittered wickedly out from the twilight of their caverns; he frowned a black frown; he lifted his lean hand and waved us peremptorily away. But the widow kept straight on, till she had got out the fact that I was a stranger and an American. The man's face changed at once, brightened, became even eager—and the next moment he and I were alone together.

I opened up in cast-iron German; he responded in quite flexible English; thereafter we gave the German language a permanent rest.

This consumptive and I became good friends. I visited him every day, and we talked about everything. At least, about everything but wives and children. Let anybody's wife or anybody's child be mentioned and three things always followed: the most gracious and loving and tender light glimmered in the man's eyes for a moment; faded out the next, and in its place came that deadly look which had flamed there the first time I ever saw his lids unclose; thirdly, he ceased from speech there and then for that day, lay silent, abstracted, and absorbed, apparently heard nothing that I said, took no notice of my good-byes and plainly did not know by either sight or hearing when I left the room.

WHEN I had been this Karl Ritter's daily and sole intimate during two months, he one day said abruptly:

"I will tell you my story."

Then he went on as follows:

"I have never given up until now. But now I have given up. I am going to die. I made up my mind last night that it must be, and very soon, too. You say that you are going to revisit your river by and by, when you find opportunity. Very well; that, together with a certain strange experience which fell to my lot last night, determines me to tell you my history—for you will see Napoleon, Arkansas, and for my sake you will stop there and do a certain thing for me—a thing which you will willingly undertake after you shall have heard my narrative.

"Let us shorten the story wherever we can, for it will need it, being long. You already know how I came to go to America, and how I came to settle in that lonely region in the South. But you do not know that I had a wife. My wife was young, beautiful, loving, and oh, so divinely good and blameless and gentle! And our little girl was her mother in miniature. It was the happiest of happy households.

"One night—it was toward the close of the war—I woke up out of a sodden lethargy, and found myself bound and gagged, and the air tainted with chloroform! I saw two men in the room, and one was saying to the other in a hoarse whisper: 'I *told* her I would, if she made a noise, and as for the child——'

"The other man interrupted in a low, half-crying voice:

" 'You said we'd only gag them and rob them, not hurt them, or I wouldn't have come.'

" 'Shut up your whining; *had* to change the plan when they waked up. You done all *you* could to protect them, now let that satisfy you. Come, help rummage.'

"Both men were masked and wore coarse, ragged 'nigger' clothes; they had a bull's-eye lantern, and by its light I noticed that the gentler robber had no thumb on his right hand. They rummaged around my poor cabin for a mo-

ment; the head bandit then said in his stage whisper:

" 'It's a waste of time—*he* shall tell where it's hid. Undo his gag and revive him up.'

"The other said:

" 'All right—provided no clubbing.'

" 'No clubbing it is, then—provided he keeps still.'

"They approached me. Just then there was a sound outside, a sound of voices and trampling hoofs; the robbers held their breath and listened; the sounds came slowly nearer and nearer, then came a shout:

" '*Hello,* the house! Show a light, we want water.'

" 'The captain's voice, by G——!' said the stage-whispering ruffian, and both robbers fled by the way of the back door, shutting off their bull's-eye as they ran.

"The stranger shouted several times more, then rode by—there seemed to be a dozen of the horses—and I heard nothing more.

"I struggled, but could not free myself from my bonds. I tried to speak, but the gag was effective, I could not make a sound. I listened for my wife's voice and my child's—listened long and intently, but no sound came from the other end of the room where their bed was. This silence became more and more awful, more and more ominous, every moment. Could you have endured an hour of it, do you think? Pity me, then, who had to endure three. Three hours? it was three ages! Whenever the clock struck it seemed as if years had gone by since I had heard it last. All this time I was struggling in my bonds, and at last, about dawn, I got myself free and rose up and stretched my stiff limbs. I was able to distinguish details pretty well. The floor was littered with things thrown there by the robbers during their search for my savings. The first object that caught my particular attention was a document of mine which I had seen the rougher of the two ruffians glance at and then cast away. It had blood on it! I staggered to the other end of the room. Oh, poor unoffending, helpless ones, there they lay; their troubles ended, mine begun!

"Did I appeal to the law—I? Does it quench the pauper's thirst if the king drink for him? Oh, no, no, no! I wanted no impertinent interference of the law. Laws and the gallows could not pay the debt that was owing to me! Let the laws leave the matter in my hands, and have no fears: I would find the debtor and collect the debt. How accomplish this, do you say? How accomplish it and feel so sure about it, when I had neither seen the robbers' faces, nor heard their natural voices, nor had any idea who they might be? Nevertheless, I *was* sure—quite sure, quite confident. I had a clue—a clue which you would not have valued—a clue which would not have greatly helped even a detective, since he would lack the secret of how to apply it. I shall come to that presently—you shall see. Let us go on now, taking things in their due order. There was one circumstance which gave me a slant in a definite direction to begin with: Those two robbers were manifestly soldiers in tramp disguise, and not new to military service, but old in it—regulars, perhaps; they did not acquire their soldierly attitude, gestures, carriage, in a day, nor a month, nor yet in a year. So I thought, but said nothing. And one of them had said, 'The captain's voice, by G——!'—the one whose life I would have. Two miles away several regiments were in camp, and two companies of U. S. cavalry. When I learned that Captain Blakely of Company C had passed our way that night with an escort I said nothing, but in that company I resolved to seek my man. In

conversation I studiously and persistently described the robbers as tramps, camp followers; and among this class the people made useless search, none suspecting the soldiers but me.

"WORKING patiently by night in my desolated home, I made a disguise for myself out of various odds and ends of clothing; in the nearest village I bought a pair of blue goggles. By and by, when the military camp broke up, and Company C was ordered a hundred miles north, to Napoleon, I secreted my small hoard of money in my belt and took my departure in the night. When Company C arrived in Napoleon I was already there. Yes, I was there, with a new trade —fortune-teller. Not to seem partial, I made friends and told fortunes among all the companies garrisoned there, but I gave Company C the great bulk of my attentions. I made myself limitlessly obliging to these particular men; they could ask me no favor, put on me no risk which I would decline. I became the willing butt of their jokes; this perfected my popularity; I became a favorite.

"I early found a private who lacked a thumb—what joy it was to me! And when I found that he alone, of all the company, had lost a thumb, my last misgiving vanished; I was *sure* I was on the right track. This man's name was Kruger, a German. There were nine Germans in the company. I watched to see who might be his intimates, but he seemed to have no especial intimates. But *I* was his intimate, and I took care to make the intimacy grow. Sometimes I so hungered for my revenge that I could hardly restrain myself from going on my knees and begging him to point out the man who had murdered my wife and child, but I managed to bridle my tongue. I bided my time and went on telling fortunes, as opportunity offered.

"My apparatus was simple: a little red paint and a bit of white paper. I painted the ball of the client's thumb, took a print of it on the paper, studied it that night, and revealed his fortune to him next day. What was my idea in this nonsense? It was this: When I was a youth, I knew an old Frenchman who had been a prison-keeper for thirty years, and he told me that there was one thing about a person which never changed, from the cradle to the grave—the lines in the ball of the thumb; and he said that these lines were never exactly alike in the thumbs of any two human beings. In these days, we photograph the new criminal, and hang his picture in the Rogues' Gallery for future reference; but that Frenchman, in his day, used to take a print of the ball of a new prisoner's thumb and put that away for future reference. He always said that pictures were no good—future disguises could make them useless. 'The thumb's the only sure thing,' said he; 'you can't disguise that.' And he used to prove his theory, too, on my friends and acquaintances; it always succeded.

"I went on telling fortunes. Every night I shut myself in, all alone, and studied the day's thumb-prints with a magnifying glass. Imagine the devouring eagerness with which I poured over those mazy red spirals, with that document by my side which bore the right-hand thumb and finger-marks of that unknown murderer, printed with the dearest blood—to me—that was ever shed on this earth! And many and many a time I had to repeat the same old disappointed remark, 'Will they *never* correspond?'

"But my reward came at last. It was the print of the thumb of the forty-third man of Company C whom I had experimented on—Private Franz Adler. An hour before I did not know the murderer's name, or voice, or figure, or face, or

nationality; but now I knew all these things! I believed I might feel sure; the Frenchman's repeated demonstrations being so good a warranty. Still, there was a way to *make* sure. I had an impression of Kruger's left thumb. In the morning I took him aside when he was off duty; and when we were out of sight and hearing of witnesses, I said impressively:

" 'A part of your fortune is so grave that I thought it would be better for you if I did not tell it in public. You and another man, whose fortune I was studying last night—Private Adler—have been murdering a woman and a child! You are being dogged. Within five days both of you will be assassinated.'

"He dropped on his knees, frightened out of his wits; and for five minutes he kept pouring out the same set of words, like a demented person, and in the same half-crying way which was one of my memories of that murderous night in my cabin:

" 'I didn't do it; upon my soul I didn't do it; and I tried to keep *him* from doing it. I did, as God is my witness. He did it alone.'

"This was all I wanted. And I tried to get rid of the fool; but no, he clung to me, imploring me to save him from the assassin. He said:

" 'I have money—ten thousand dollars—hid away, the fruit of loot and thievery; save me—tell me what to do, and you shall have it, every penny. Two-thirds of it is my cousin Adler's; but you can take it all. We hid it when we first came here. But I hid it in a new place yesterday, and have not told him—shall not tell him. I was going to desert, and get away with it all. It is gold, and too heavy to carry when one is running and dodging; but a woman who has been gone over the river two days to prepare my way for me is going to follow me with it; and if I got no chance to describe the hiding-place to her I was going to slip my silver watch into her hand, or send it to her, and she would understand. There's a piece of paper in the back of the case which tells it all. Here, take the watch—tell me what to do!'

"He was trying to press his watch upon me, and was exposing the paper and explaining it to me, when Adler appeared on the scene, about a dozen yards away. I said to poor Kruger:

" 'Put up your watch, I don't want it. You sha'n't come to any harm. Go, now. I must tell Adler his fortune. Presently I will tell you how to escape the assassin; meantime I shall have to examine your thumb-mark again. Say nothing to Adler about this thing—say nothing to anybody.'

"He went away filled with fright and gratitude, poor devil! I told Adler a long fortune—purposely so long that I could not finish it; promised to come to him on guard, that night, and tell him the really important part of it—the tragical part of it, I said—so must be out of reach of eavesdroppers. They always kept a picket-watch outside the town—mere discipline and ceremony—no occasion for it, no enemy around.

"Toward midnight I set out, equipped with the countersign, and picked my way toward the lonely region where Adler was to keep his watch. It was so dark that I stumbled right on a dim figure almost before I could get out a protecting word. The sentinel hailed and I answered, both at the same moment. I added, 'It's only me—the fortune-teller.' Then I slipped to the poor devil's side, and without a word I drove my dirk into his heart! '*Ja wohl,*' laughed I, 'it *was* the tragedy part of his fortune, indeed!' As he fell from his horse he clutched at me, and my blue goggles remained in his hand;

and away plunged the beast, dragging him with his foot in the stirrup.

"I fled through the woods and made good my escape, leaving the accusing goggles behind me in the dead man's hand.

"THIS was fifteen or sixteen years ago. Since then I have wandered aimlessly about the earth, sometimes at work, sometimes idle; sometimes with money, sometimes with none; but always tired of life, and wishing it was done, for my mission here was finished with the act of that night; and the only pleasure, solace, satisfaction I had, in all those tedious years, was in the daily reflection, 'I have killed him!'

"Four years ago my health began to fail. I had wandered into Munich, in my purposeless way. Being out of money I sought work, and got it; did my duty faithfully about a year, and was then given the berth of night watchman yonder in that deadhouse which you visited lately. The place suited my mood. I liked it. I liked being with the dead—liked being alone with them. I used to wander among those rigid corpses, and peer into their austere faces, by the hour. The later the time, the more impressive it was; I preferred the late time. Sometimes I turned the lights low; this gave perspective, you see; and the imagination could play; always, the dim, receding ranks of the dead inspired one with weird and fascinating fancies. Two years ago—I had been there a year then—I was sitting all alone in the watch-room, one gusty winter's night, chilled, numb, comfortless; drowsing gradually into unconsciousness; the sobbing of the wind and the slamming of distant shutters falling fainter and fainter upon my dulling ear each moment, when sharp and suddenly that dead-bell rang out a blood-curdling alarum over my head! The shock of it nearly paralyzed me; for it was the first time I had ever heard it.

"I gathered myself together and flew to the corpse-room. About midway down the outside rank, a shrouded figure was sitting upright, wagging its head slowly from one side to the other—a grisly spectacle! Its side was toward me. I hurried to it and peered into its face. Heavens, it was Adler!

"Can you divine what my first thought was? Put into words, it was this: 'It seems, then, you escaped me once: there will be a different result this time!'

"Evidently this creature was suffering unimaginable terrors. Think what it must have been to wake up in the midst of that voiceless hush, and look out over that grim congregation of the dead! What gratitude shone in his skinny white face when he saw a living form before him! And how the fervency of this mute gratitude was augmented when his eyes fell upon the life-giving cordials which I carried in my hands! Then imagine the horror which came into his pinched face when I put the cordials behind me, and said mockingly:

" 'Speak up, Franz Adler—call upon these dead! Doubtless they will listen and have pity; but here there is none else that will.'

"He tried to speak, but that part of the shroud which bound his jaws held firm, and would not let him. He tried to lift imploring hands, but they were crossed upon his breast and tied. I said:

" 'Shout, Franz Adler; make the sleepers in the distant streets hear you and bring help. Shout—and lose no time, for there is little to lose. What, you can not? That is a pity; but it is no matter—it does not always bring help. When you and your cousin murdered a helpless woman and child in a cabin in Arkansas—my wife, it was, and my child!—they shrieked for help, you remember; but it did no good; you remember that it did no good, is it not so? Your teeth chatter—then why can not you shout? Loosen the bandages with your hands—then you can.

Ah, I see—your hands are tied, they can not aid you. How strangely things repeat themselves, after long years; for *my* hands were tied, that night, you remember? Yes, tied much as yours are now—how odd that is! I could not pull free. It did not occur to you to untie me; it does not occur to me to untie you. 'Sh—! there's a late footstep. It is coming this way. Hark, how near it is! One can count the footfalls—one—two—three. There—it is just outside. Now is the time! Shout, man, shout! it is the one sole chance between you and eternity! Ah, you see you have delayed too long—it is gone by. There—it is dying out. It is gone! Think of it—reflect upon it—you have heard a human footstep for the last time. How curious it must be, to listen to so common a sound as that and know that one will never hear the fellow to it again.'

"Oh, my friend, the agony in that shrouded face was ecstasy to see! I thought of a new torture, and applied it—assisting myself with a trifle of lying invention:

" 'That poor Kruger tried to save my wife and child, and I did him a grateful good turn for it when the time came. I persuaded him to rob you; and I and a woman helped him to desert, and got him away in safety.'

"A look as of surprize and triumph shone out dimly through the anguish in my victim's face. I was disturbed, disquieted. I said:

" 'What, then—didn't he escape?'

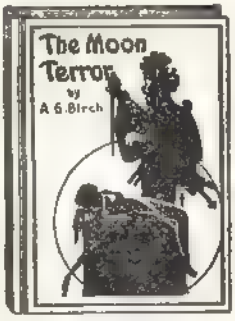
"A negative shake of the head.

" 'No? What happened, then?'

The satisfaction in the shrouded face was still plainer. The man tried to mumble out some words—could not succeed; tried to express something with his obstructed hands—failed; paused a moment, then feebly tilted his head, in a meaning

IT IS NOT TOO LATE—

to read one of the most popular stories that has been printed in this magazine to date. Through popular demand we have published a cloth-bound edition of "The Moon Terror," by A. G. Birch, to satisfy those who were not fortunate enough to read this startling story when it appeared serially in the early issues of WEIRD TALES.



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way, toward the corpse that lay nearest him.

" 'Dead?' I asked. 'Failed to escape? caught in the act and shot?'

"Negative shake of the head.

" 'How, then?'

"Again the man tried to do something with his hands. I watched closely, but could not guess the intent. I bent over and watched still more intently. He had twisted a thumb around and was weakly punching at his breast with it.

" 'Ah—stabbed, do you mean?'

"Affirmative nod, accompanied by a spectral smile of such devilishness that it struck an awakening light through my dull brain, and I cried:

" 'Did *I* stab him, mistaking him for you? for that stroke was meant for none but you."

"The affirmative nod of the re-dying rascal was as joyous as his failing strength was able to put into its expression.

" 'Oh, miserable, miserable me, to slaughter the pitying soul that stood a friend to my darlings when they were helpless, and would have saved them if he could! Miserable, oh, miserable, miserable me!'

"I fancied I heard the muffled gurgle of a mocking laugh. I took my face out of my hands, and saw my enemy sinking back upon his inclined board.

"He was a satisfactory long time dying. He had a wonderful vitality, an astonishing constitution. Yes, he was a pleasant long time at it. I got a chair and a newspaper, and sat down by him and read. Occasionally I took a sip of brandy. This was necessary, on account of the cold. But I did it partly because I saw that, along at first, whenever I reached for the bottle, he thought I was going to give him some. I read aloud: mainly imaginary accounts of people snatched from the grave's threshold and restored to life and vigor by a few spoonfuls of liquor and a warm bath. Yes, he had a long, hard death of it—three hours and six minutes, from the time he rang his bell.

"It is believed that in all these eighteen years that have elapsed since the institution of the corpse-watch, no shrouded occupant of the Bavarian dead-houses has ever rung its bell. Well, it is a harmless belief. Let it stand at that.

"THE chill of that death-room had penetrated my bones. It revived and fastened upon me the disease which had been afflicting me, but which, up to that night, had been steadily disappearing. That man murdered my wife and my child; and in three days hence he will have added me to his list. No matter—God! how delicious the memory of it! I caught him escaping from his grave, and thrust him back into it!

"After that night I was confined to my bed for a week; but as soon as I could get about I went to the dead-house books and got the number of the house which Adler had died in. A wretched lodging-house it was. It was my idea that he would naturally have gotten hold of Kruger's effects, being his cousin; and I wanted to get Kruger's watch, if I could. But while I was sick, Adler's things had been sold and scattered, all except a few old letters, and some odds and ends of no value. However, through those letters I traced out a son of Kruger's, the only relative he left. He is a man of thirty, now, a shoemaker by trade, and living at No. 14 Königstrasse, Mannheim—widower, with several small children. Without explaining to him why, I have furnished two-thirds of his support ever since.

"Now, as to that watch—see how strangely things happen! I traced it

around and about Germany for more than a year, at considerable cost in money and vexation; and at last I got it. Got it, and was unspeakably glad; opened it, and found nothing in it! Why, I might have known that that bit of paper was not going to stay there all this time. Of course I gave up that ten thousand dollars then; gave it up, and dropped it out of my mind; and most sorrowfully, for I had wanted it for Kruger's son.

"Last night, when I consented at last that I must die, I began to make ready. I proceded to burn all useless papers; and sure enough, from a batch of Adler's, not previously examined with thoroughness, out dropped that long-desired scrap! I recognized it in a moment. Here it is—I will translate it:

"Brick livery stable, stone foundation, middle of town, corner of Orleans and Market. Corner toward Court-house. Third stone, fourth row. Stick notice there, saying how many are to come.

"There—take it, and preserve it! Kruger explained that that stone was removable; and that it was in the north wall of the foundation, fourth row from the top, and third stone from the west. The money is secreted behind it. He said the closing sentence was a blind, to mislead in case the paper should fall into wrong hands. It probably performed that office for Adler.

"Now I want to beg that when you make your intended journey down the river, you will hunt out that hidden money, and send it to Adam Kruger, care of the Mannheim address which I have mentioned. It will make a rich man of him, and I shall sleep the sounder in my grave for knowing that I have done what I could for the son of the man who tried to save my wife and child—albeit my hand ignorantly struck him down, whereas the impulse of my heart would have been to shield and serve him."

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The Druid's Shadow

(Continued from page 454)

ingly while with eloquent, outflung hands she made a gesture of supreme surrender —"see me as I kneel before thee! See this body, so soft, so tender, so full of delight; it is thine—all, all thine, if only thou wilt spare me—*o-o-oh—o-o-o-oh—ai-ee!*" Again her frantic scream set my nerves a-tingle, and I thanked the heavenly powers that cries of pain would cause less public comment coming from a doctor's house than any other place.

She balled her fingers into diminutive fists and wrestled back and forth as though her wrists were in the vise-like grip of some grim, relentless captor.

Her eyes were open now, wide open, and filmed with horror indescribable. Her face was deathly pale, her whole body vibrant with an agony of desperate fear. In silence now she struggled, but how! She was like a madwoman, clawing, twisting, writhing. She turned her head and spat into an invisible face; she dug her feet into the rug, tried to fling herself prostrate, twined herself about her captor; once she bent swiftly and I heard the snap of her small, sharp teeth as she went through the dumb show of fleshing them in a man's arm. Her face was livid, scarcely like a living thing.

Now her struggles lessened. Her shrieks subsided to weak whimpers, and she followed pitifully, though reluctantly, in the wake of her unseen conductor like a little broken-spirited child led out for punishment. Her arms were stretched before her, hands drooping, as though her wrists were held fast in a powerful grip. Her head bent listlessly, rolled and lolled from side to side, as if extremity of terror had sapped her last shred of vitality, leaving her scarcely strong enough to stand erect.

But once again she galvanized to action. Apparently they were come to their destination, for she halted, struggled backward a moment, then held one hand out from her side as though it were being made fast to something.

And I swear I could see the marks of the invisible ligature as the cord was tightly drawn about her wrist!

Now the other hand was pinioned and now her slender ankles were crossed one upon another, and one after another we saw the furrows form, saw the silk-meshed stockings sink in on the shrinking flesh as invisible bonds were cruelly tightened.

She half leaned, half lay across a chair-arm, her body taut and rigid as a drawn bow, white and still as a lovely Andromeda carven in marble, and in her misty, tear-gemmed eyes was such a look of tragic, mute appeal as nearly broke my heart. She held her fixed, unnatural pose until my muscles ached in sympathy. "Good heavens," I exclaimed, "de Grandin, this is terrible, we must——"

"Observe, my friend, he comes, he is arrived, he is here!" the Frenchman's shout drowned out my protest as he seized me by the elbow and swung me round.

My heart all but ceased to beat as I turned. Framed in the window of the study, like a portrait of incarnate evil and malevolence executed by a master craftsman, was the face of James Bartrow.

But such a face! Gone was every vestige of the urbane man of the world I knew, and in its place there was the very distillation of savagery, wild, insane rage and lust for killing. His matted hair lay on his forehead, his beard was fairly bristling with ferocity, and on his

tight-drawn lips there sat a sneering smile of mingled hate and murderous blood-lustfulness.

"So," he cried, and his voice was thin and cracked with madness, "so, I find ye, do I? Too long ye've robbed me of my vengeance, ye filth-filled vessel of pollution. The Gods cry out for sacrifice, and here am I, their servant and their priest, prepared to render them their due!"

With one gigantic heave he tore the copper screen from out the window and drew himself up to the sill. A moment he crouched there, like a great, savage cat about to spring; then with a leap he cleared the intervening space and towered over Sylvia. I started as I saw the gleam of something white in his right hand. It was a long and slender blade chipped from flint, the sort of weapon I'd seen in museums.

"I all but slew ye in the grove of Cambria," he roared, "and by the heart I would have plucked from your breast I would have made my divinations; but ye did escape me then. This time I have ye fairly. Look on me, Cwerfa, and know your hour is come, for by the stone of Cromlech's ring I brought across the seas, and by the holy mistletoe that grows upon the sacred oak, and by the mystic gem of serpents' spew, I'm here to cut the heart from out your breast as I would have long ago!

"They thought they'd packed me off and gotten rid of me—ha, ha!—but I came back, and when I found ye'd fled the house wherein I kept the Cromlech stone, I knew ye must have sought protection from the Frankish outlander as once before ye found it with the Romans, and here I am to claim your forfeit life, and none shall say me nay!" With a wild, maniacal roar he leaned across the girl and wrenched the flimsy silken drapery from her bosom.

"Your pardon, *Monsieur,* but Jules de

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Grandin is here, and he does most emphatically say nay!" the Frenchman interrupted and struck the towering madman a stunning blow upon the head with the carafe of chilled water which stood beside the decanter of brandy on the study table.

The bludgeoned maniac fell crashing to the floor, and almost as he fell de Grandin was on him, wrenching the stone knife from his grasp, tearing a pongee curtain from its rods and twisting it into a rope with which he pinioned Bartrow's wrists behind him and made them fast with double knots.

"And now, my friend, I would that you accompany me at once to this one's residence," he ordered, snatching down another curtain and fastening the prisoner's feet together, then dragging him to the entrance of the study and tethering him securely to one of the white pillars which flanked the doorway. "Come, it is of the greatest import!" he urged. "We have no little moment to stand here stupidly and stare."

Dazed, but goaded by his constant pleas for haste, I drove him to the Bartrow home, and waited while he clamored at the door. He had a brief parley with the servant who responded to his summons, disappeared within the house and emerged a moment later bearing a frame of ancient weathered oak in which was set an oblong of dull, grayish stone. In his left hand he swung a canvas sack like those used by banks for holding minor coins, and in it something clinked and jingled musically.

"I think I have them all," he told me. "Rush, hasten, fly back to your house, my friend. There is work ahead of us!"

He led me to the cellar as soon as we returned, and in the furnace we built a roaring fire of newspapers and stray bits of wood, and when we had it blazing we heaped a few shovelfuls of coal upon it. As soon as all was glowing he tossed the oak-framed stone and the collection of flint arrowheads into the fiery crater. Last of all he flung in the stone knife he had taken from Bartrow when he struck him down.

THE oak frame of the stone burned furiously, and to my great surprize the stone itself and the arrowheads and knife seemed to offer small resistance to the fire, but turned into a sort of brittle and crumbling lime. We waited fifteen minutes or so, while the fire completed its work of destruction; then the Frenchman seized the heavy iron poker and mashed the burned stone relics into powder, dumped the clinkers into the ash-pit and stirred them all together till none could tell which had been Pennsylvania coal and which the old stone curios which Bartrow prized so highly. "Come, let us see what passes up above," he ordered when he had finished with the poker, and led the way to the study.

Sylvia had fallen to the floor, and de Grandin raised her and placed her comfortably in a chair, then, having rearranged the mutilated corsage of her dress, turned his attention to the still unconscious Bartrow. "I think we may release him, now," he commented, and together we undid the knots and tugged and pulled until we had him in a chair.

"Revive him, if you please," de Grandin ordered, and set the motors of his whirling mirrors going.

I dashed some water into Bartrow's face and held a vial of ammoniated salts to his nostrils, and as his eyelids quivered de Grandin struck him lightly on the cheek. "Observe—look—see here!" he ordered.

Bartrow struggled half-way from his chair, gazed at the spinning mirrors a moment, then sat forward, his gaze riv-

eted to the bright concentric circles they described.

Softly, carefully, forcefully, de Grandin ordered him to sleep, repeating his command until it was obeyed; then, when he had stopped the motor, he moved to the center of the room, and:

"My friends, I bid you listen to me carefully," he ordered. "You, Monsieur Ransome, know nothing of that which has transpired. It is good. Very good. Continue in your ignorance. You, Madame Sylvia, have quite forgotten every fear of olden days, and of the present; to you your father-in-law is but a kindly old gentleman who loves you and whom you love in turn.

"And you, Monsieur Bartrow the elder," he turned his piercing gaze on the older man, "whatever it was which did possess you is gone away. I have destroyed it utterly. No longer will the impulse to murder Madame Sylvia be with you. You hear me? You will—you *must* obey. She is to you the much-loved wife of your much-loved son; no more, no less, and as such you will give her your affection and make her welcome to your heart and home."

He paused a moment, then continued: "You will rise up, go to the street, and in two minutes reappear at the front door of this house, nor will you know that you have called before or why you came. Go. *En avant; allez-vous-en!*

"Awake, my friends; wake Monsieur Ransome, wake Madame Sylvia; the experiment is done and you are sleeping long!" he cried gayly, snapping his fingers at Ransome and Sylvia in turn. "*Parbleu,* I did think these little dancing mirrors would have made you sleep the clock around!" he added as they opened heavy eyes.

"Did we really fall asleep? How stupid!" Sylvia exclaimed. "I don't think it very nice of you to invite us to dinner,

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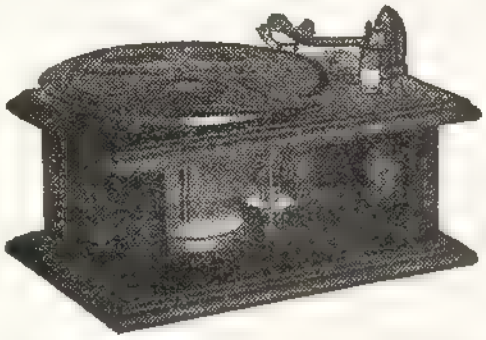

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then put us to sleep with your horrid apparatus, Doctor de Grandin."

"Ah, *Madame,* I am desolated that it should have happened thus," he answered, "but you are doubtless rested by the nap; come, let us go upon the porch once more and smoke a cigarette."

"Good evening, every one," James Bartrow sauntered out on the veranda, "hope I'm not intruding. I couldn't stand it out at the lake any longer, so I hopped a train and came back to town. They told me you children had gone over here, so I came along to see you were all right. Did they give you a good dinner?"

"Why, Daddy Jim, how nice of you to come!" Sylvia jumped from her chair, threw her arms about her father-in-law's neck and kissed him on both bearded cheeks. "I've been wishing you'd come back," she added.

He patted her shoulder affectionately. "Great girl, eh, Trowbridge?" he asked pridefully as he sank into a chair beside me and lighted a cigar.

We chatted inconsequentially for an hour or so; then the Bartrows, on the best of terms with us and with each other, bade us good-night.

"NOW," I threatened as the echo of their laughing voices died away, "will you explain all this craziness I've seen tonight, or must I choke an explanation from you?"

He raised his shoulders in a shrug. "*Le bon Dieu* knows," he confessed. "I hardly dare to venture an opinion.

"When first we entered Monsieur Bartrow's house and saw the look of savage exultation on his face when he beheld the little bride, and the expression of stark terror with which she looked at him, I said to me, *'Parbleu,* Jules de Grandin, what are the meaning of this?' And I replied:

" 'Jules de Grandin, I do not know.'

"Your West, he is like our Foreign Legion, the port of men who would be forgotten, and that young Madame Bartrow came from there I knew. Was it that in his younger days the elder Bartrow had sojourned in that country and there had formed a feud with some member of her family? And did he recognize her as a foeman's child the moment he put eyes on her? Perhaps. I could not be sure of anything, and so I waited and wondered.

"A little light came to us when he called here to consult you. He wished to kill her, he declared, he had an impulse almost irresistible to do her injury, and yet he knew not why it was. Ah, but his dream—you do recall? He dreamed he trailed her through a deep, dark grove of oak trees, and there he found her, all bound and helpless, and robed in white. And white, my friend, has almost always been the color of the robe of sacrifice. What could *this* mean? I asked me. The holy angels only know.

"No, there was another one who knew, at least, in part, and Madame Sylvia was she. Held fast within the secret chamber of her mind there was a recollection of her father-in-law's visit. Undoubtlessly he spoke when he accosted her; his words would surely give some clue to why he wished her injury. 'Very well, then,' I say to me. 'If Madame Sylvia holds the answer, she shall tell us.'

"And so we did. With dinner I did bait my trap, and when she came I was prepared to make invasion of the secret kingdom of her mind. But first I asked a few small questions of her husband.

"While we were at his house I had noticed certain things concerning it. Within the lovely little park which stands about his home, I had seen nothing but oak trees, little oaks, great oaks, and

oaks which were neither large nor small. That was unusual. Also I noticed much oaken furniture within the house, and the fine Tudor wainscot in the drawing-room.

"And so I asked about the wood, leading young Monsieur Ransome to correct what he thought my mistake, that he might speak more freely, and thus I learned of his father's so strange passion for oak. Also he told me of the foolish whim which made his father import and keep a Druid stone from Wales. Ah, that also was important, but just why I could not say at that time. No, I needed further information.

"So I interrogated Madame Sylvia. *Tiens,* there I was like Monsieur Robin the tailor in your so droll nursery rime, he who

> . . . bent his bow,
> Shot at a sparrow
> And killed a crow.

For where I sought only to unlatch the darkened window and let in light upon her little fear, behold, I opened wide the door upon a fearsome memory so dreadful that almost countless generations had not been long enough to bury it beneath their years. Yes."

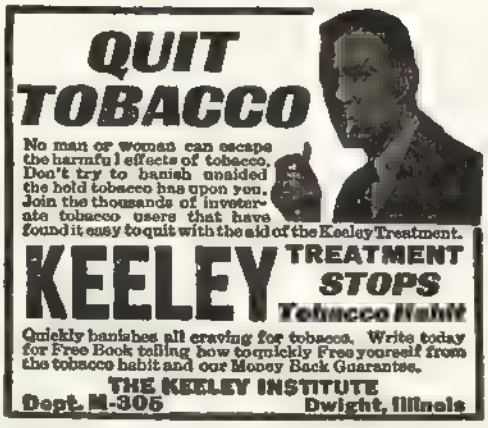
"What do you mean?" I asked, bewildered.

He gazed at me a moment, then: "What is instinct?" he demanded.

"Why, I suppose you might call it an innate quality, apart from reason or experience, which prompts animals of the same species to react to certain definite stimuli in the same manner."

"Very good," he complimented. "The day-old chick needs no example to teach it to pick up grains of corn, the newborn infant needs not to be told to take the breast—Madame Sylvia's little kitten required none to tell him that the serpent was his deadly foe. No.

"But *why* is instinct. What makes it?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See inside cover, opposite first page, for important announcement in this issue.

It is mass memory, transmitted from our earliest forebears, and stored up in our subconscious minds for use in emergency. Nothing less.

"But we have other memories from other times. Take, by example, the common dream of falling through space. Who has not had it? For why? Because it is a racial memory. It dates from the remote day when our ancestors dwelt in trees. With them the danger of death by falling was always present. Many died thus, all at one time or other fell and were injured more or less severely. Now, any serious injury produced shock, and shock in turn produced certain definite molecular changes in the tissues of the brain. These were transmitted to the fallers' progeny. *Voilà,* we have the racial memory.

"Now, consider: Though every one has dreamed he fell—and often wakened in an agony of terror—we never have this sense of falling while we are awake. No. Why is that? Because our waking, *modern* personality knows no such danger. Ah, then, you see? It must be another personality, distinct from that we have while waking, which dreams of falling, a personality which has a recollection of falling from a tree or over a great cliff.

"Very well. In everyday experience we meet with men who have extraordinary memories; they can remember accurately events which happened when they were but three or four years old. Such men are rare, yet they do exist.

"Very good. Why is it not then possible that there may live those who can remember the days of long ago—who can recall what happened to an ancestor of theirs as an *individual,* rather than to their whole ancestry as a group? I do not mean *consciously,* remember. But no. I mean they have the memory latent, as we all have the falling-through-space memory when we are asleep.

"Place such an one as this in a state of hypnosis, where there is no interference from the conscious mind of the wake-a-day world, and that other, buried, memory might easily be resurrected. *N'est-ce-pas?*"

"But Bartrow and Sylvia seemed to recognize each other simultaneously, and they were wide awake when they did it," I objected.

"*Précisément.* You have expressed it. It is strange, it is odd, it is almost unbelievable, but it is true. Of all the millions in the world, those two, the one with strange, uncanny memory of a thwarted vengeance, the other with the dreadful recollection of a terrible ordeal, were brought together. And as steel strikes sparks from flint, so did their personalities enkindle the light of memory in each, though the memory was vague, and he knew not the reason for his hatred of her and she could not find reason for her fear of him.

"But from what we saw and heard tonight we can piece the gruesome puzzle into something like the semblance of a picture. Long, long ago, an ancestor of Bartrow's was a Druid, perhaps an Archdruid—one of those awful priests who served and worshipped nameless gods in groves of oak. Diodorus Siculus described their rites of divination by means of hearts and entrails plucked from living human sacrifices; Cæsar, in his *De Bello Gallico,* mentions the burning alive of human victims in cages made of wicker. They were a wicked, cruel, unclean hierarchy, my friend, and the noblest thing the Romans did was to destroy them, root and branch. Yes.

"Remember how Monsieur Bartrow, while in his fit of madness, swore by the gem of serpents' spew? That is surely confirmation, for on his brow the Arch-

druid was wont to wear a glowing jewel —probably an opal—supposed to be made from crystallized spittle of serpents. Together with the oak, the mistletoe and the yew-bough, it was regarded as a thing of peculiar holiness by them.

"Très bon. We have now placed Monsieur Bartrow on the stage of olden days. What of Madame Sylvia? It seems her acting of the scene of sacrifice should tell the tale.

"Undoubtlessly she was a sort of priestess of the Druids, a kind of Vestal, vowed forever to virginity, and liable to horrid death if she committed any breach of discipline. But she was, as she did say, 'formed for love,' and she did listen to the dictates of her woman's heart, only to be discovered by a Druid priest and led away to the great sacrificial oak to suffer death.

"And yet she must have lived—did not Monsieur Bartrow refer to her finding shelter with the Romans? Too, she must have had offspring, and to them given the curse of memory of the Druid's shadow which lay across her path, and of that progeny, poor Madame Sylvia was one. Yes.

"And Monsieur Bartrow—in him there lived the memory of *his* ancestor, and of his thwarted vengeance. He was peculiarly sensitive to the influence of the old ones, as is evidenced by his love of oak and his collection of Druid relics. These relics, too, although he knew it not, were constant stimulants of his unrealized thirst for vengeance. When he and Madame Sylvia did confront each other —*eh bien,* we know the rest. He was the Druid priest once more and she the victim who escaped from sacrifice. *Parbleu,* he almost balanced the account tonight, I think!"

"But see here," I asked, "isn't there still danger that he'll revert to that

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Read first inside cover for important announcement in this issue.

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strange condition again? Is it safe for her to live near him?"

"I think so," he returned. "Remember, my friend, mental sores are much like those of the body. Left to themselves they mortify and fester, but if we open them—*pouf!*—they vanish. So with this strange pair. Tonight we probed beneath the surface of their conscious minds, deep into those age-old memories which plagued them, and from him we did extract the lust for vengeance long unsatisfied, and from her the gnawing fear of retribution. Also, for added safety, we have destroyed the relics of the Druids which he kept in his house and which daily gave new energy to his desire to accomplish that deed of murder in which his ancestor of ancient times did fail. No, my friend, the ghosts of the old priest who was raised this night, and of her whom he would have made his victim, have been laid forever in quiet graves of forgetfulness, and the shadow of the Druid no more will fall across the paths of Monsieur Bartrow and Madame Sylvia. It is very well."

"But suppose——"

"Ah bah, suppose you cease to guard that brandy bottle as a miser guards his gold," he interrupted with a smile. "My throat is desert-dry from too much explanation, and I am weary with this tiresome business of pursuing long-dead Druids and their unfaithful priestesses. Give me to drink and let me go to bed."

See the inside cover, opposite the first page of this issue, for an important announcement which will prove of interest to you.

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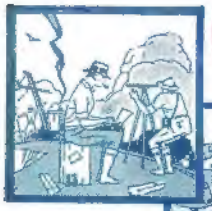

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